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Success against the odds!

An analysis of the influences involved in accessing, experiencing and completing an undergraduate degree for white working class men

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Success against the odds! An analysis of the influences involved in accessing, experiencing and completing an undergraduate degree for white working class men.

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Mary-Claire Travers
Kings College London

Abstract

Much of the research that deals with the education of white working class males in England concentrates on the lack of achievement and low post-compulsory participation rates of this cohort and searches for reasons to explain this long-standing 'failure'. In contrast, this study explores the experiences of a group of white working class young men who would generally be regarded as educationally 'successful' because they have all gained a place to study at a university in England.

A qualitative design was used to explore the experiences and perceptions of fifteen working class men who were attending elite and modern universities. The intention was to elicit what made a difference for a cohort who had 'succeeded against the odds'. The research explored their pre-university experiences of schooling and the forms of support that had facilitated their access to higher education in order to address how more young men might be supported to stay in post-compulsory education. Each participant was interviewed three times in order to chart their progression over time which produced a corpus of forty-five in depth accounts. Two complementary lenses were deployed as the key analytical tools to illuminate the perceptions and experiences of the fifteen men all attending English universities. These were the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, capital and field, and, theories related to dominant cultures of masculinity.

The findings suggest that supportive parenting and early success in the primary school make a difference to white working class male's longer term academic success. Most of the young men had the benefit of teachers who encouraged them academically and opened doors to higher education for them. Their

experiences at school left them with positive learner identities. The young men themselves persisted when most of their peers gave up and they understood the value of education. The findings also suggest that being the eldest or coming from a small family correlates with academic success, regardless of socio-economic status. However, all the participants highlighted in-school practices that they recognised as undermining the progression of white working class men like themselves.

Acknowledgements

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My husband, Glen, has been more than supportive, stopping everything whenever I asked for advice on IT matters and it must be said that these requests have been innumerable. Glen has encouraged me for very many years to continue with my higher education studies having originally stopped them in the late 1980's.

Thanks go also to my three children, Natalie, Jessica and Nicholas, who have offered encouragement, while over the years sympathetically listening to me give them a blow by blow description of my latest tribulation. A special mention must go to my parents Mia and Sef Verheggen (deceased), my first teachers, they set me on my path.

I thank the young men who willingly agreed to participate in my study. They gave very generously of their time over a two year period and their life stories kept me motivated. Finally to the many friends and family who have provided support over the years I thank you all.

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Preface

The worst thing... we as a culture do about our teenagers is that we only seem to discuss them in negative terms. What they can't do, what they aren't achieving. Why have we allowed this to happen? (Ness, 2012, p. 19)

I have been interested in the educational achievement of white working class boys since the late 1970's. My time teaching white working class children in very deprived parts of south London, compared to other experiences in England and Australia of teaching more privileged students, left me feeling that something different had to be tried to lift the academic achievements of these students. Not only for their individual sakes but also for the cost that their lack of progress has for society in terms of unemployment, lost creativity and productivity (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). There was then, and there still continues to be, a rump of some 20 -25% of young people in England who leave school with limited qualifications (Maguire, 2009). White working class boys have always been disproportionately represented in this cohort (Strand, 2014).

The under-achievement of white working class boys in England is well documented (Willis, 1977; Centre for Social Justice, 2013). They are the lowest academic achievers at the age of 16 for any socio-economic class grouping (Strand, 2014) and less well educated young men find themselves disadvantaged in the labour market (Vignoles, Coulon & Marcenaro-Gutierrez,

2011; Cassen & Kingdon, 2010). To date most research that has focussed on white working class boys has dealt with their failure to engage with education and the reasons why they do not engage (Willis, 1977; Ingram, 2009; Hills, Brewer, Jenkins, Lister, Lupton, et al., 2010). In contrast, my research has taken a different approach to a topic that is often reviewed from a 'problem based' stance. There is little research that explores academically successful white boys from a working class background and the multifaceted variables that contribute to their success. The aim of my study is to explore the factors that have contributed to the academic success of a group of 15 white working class young men. My intention is also to provide a socially contextualized account of 'success', to explore the occupational outcomes of studying different degrees at different types of higher education institutions and provide detailed, critical and socially contextualised accounts of the life experiences of these academically successful white working class young men.

The study is based on research data gathered from three in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with each young man over a two year period. At the time of the first interview the participants were just beginning their second year of undergraduate study at four different universities. Two of the universities were modern universities and the other two were elite universities.

The second interview was undertaken at the end of their second year of undergraduate study and the final interview was conducted in the spring term of their third year. The first interview was conducted with 15 young men. One of my participants withdrew from university towards the end of his second year of study so 14 young men participated in the second interview. The third interview was conducted with 13 of the original participants as another young

man did not return to university for the third year of study. Each of the 13 remaining participants successfully completed their undergraduate degree.

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One contextualizes the study by providing a brief overview of white working class boys' academic achievement at the end of their compulsory schooling, the socio-cultural factors that potentially contribute to the educational underachievement of boys from a working class background and those factors that appear to contribute to the academic success of my participants. In this chapter I also start to examine what is meant by class.

In Chapter Two I critically examine the 'massification' of higher education in England, the expansion of different types of universities and the effect these changes have had on white working class attendance at university (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). I use the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, capital and field to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the educational experiences of white working class men and how their educational experiences affect their long term academic achievements.

The Methodology Chapter details and explains the approach and the methods selected for this empirical research project. It begins with a brief explanation of the study and a short account of my research questions and how I chose the two complementary theoretical lenses that frame my research. This is followed by an explanation of the background to my project, how it began and the reasons for my choice of research paradigm. Then I detail the processes employed to construct my sample, including the difficulties encountered, the methods used for data collection, and, the transcription and data analysis process. I then examine the ethical issues encountered in the course of my research. This is followed by a discussion of the

writing up process. Finally I consider the concept of reflexivity and my positionality within the research process.

The next four chapters draw on my analysis of 42 transcribed interviews and my field notes. The chapters are organised to respond to my main research questions. Chapter Four is the first data chapter and the focus in this chapter is on establishing, from the viewpoint of the participants, those factors that led to their academic success. The chapter critically explores how fifteen young white men from working class backgrounds account for successfully having negotiated the school system and obtained admittance to university. I draw on data obtained from the initial set of 15 in-depth interviews I undertook with the participants in the autumn of 2012 when the young men were in the first term of their second year of university. In this chapter I focus on the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) of these young men, as well as their experiences in the fields of primary and secondary schools and, in some cases, the sixth form colleges they attended and the effects, if any, of the cultures of dominant masculinity that often features in research on white working class males lack of engagement with education.

Chapter Five focuses on the experiences of the young men in the two types of universities (the modern and the elite). The chapter explores how fourteen young men negotiated their way through the first two years of university. It draws on information obtained from the second set of in-depth interviews undertaken with these young men who, in all but one case, were the first in their families to attend university. When I undertook the interviews in the spring and summer of 2013 these young men were in the last half of their second year of university. In this chapter the focus is on the participants'

experiences at university including the experience, for most of them, of living away from home. I also explore how their relationships with their families develop through this period as well as their future career ambitions.

The focus in Chapter Six is on the educational outcomes of studying different degrees at different types of higher education institutions. The data is drawn from the third and final set of in-depth interviews which explore how these men negotiate their way through their third year of university study, their career ambitions, what inroads they have made in achieving these ambitions and any differences in potential career paths between those who attend the modern universities and those attending the elite universities. I critically consider how these young men perceive university life: the benefits as well as the costs of obtaining a degree and any changes that they have seen in themselves or that others may have seen in them. Finally I examine possible reasons for the withdrawal from university of two students among my cohort.

In the final data driven chapter, Chapter Seven, I focus on two inter-related concerns that are central to my research. First I consider the question of taking university experience as a measure of 'success'. To what extent is this a useful indicator and how do the young men in my study see themselves in relation to being a 'success'? Secondly I explore, from the perspectives of these successful white working class young men, what makes a difference; to what do these young men attribute their success and conversely why do they think many white working class men fail to engage with education?

The final chapter revisits the contentious issue of what the term 'working class' means and the complexities, the variegations and fractions that make up the

working class. My participants describe themselves as ‘academically successful white *working class* males’ and I felt it important to verify that they were indeed working class as well as how this term is variously understood. This chapter goes on to summarize the study’s major findings and concerns and in doing so addresses the research questions that I postulated at the beginning of the study. It also reflects on the methodology used, the limitations of the study and my positionality in the work. Finally I offer suggestions as to possible future areas of research in relation to white working class academic achievement.

Chapter One

White Working Class Academic Under-Achievement

*Education is... a social achievement for which
some of us are more prepared than others (Evans,
2006, p.13)*

Introduction

In this first chapter I want to provide a background and contextual frame for my thesis. My study is situated in a concern about white working class males' underachievement in school, the longstanding correlation between class and underachievement as well as the substantive body of research that explores the factors that influence this situation. Thus I start by providing a statistical account of the academic (under) achievement of white working class boys in England at GCSE level. This point is a critical moment for if young people fail to achieve at this stage of their educational trajectory, then the implications for their subsequent life-chances are generally severely limited. Then I go on to explain what is meant by class and the term working class and I follow this with a critical consideration of the socio-cultural factors that potentially contribute to the educational underachievement of white males from a working class background. These factors have been grouped into four categories: family influences; working class students' aspirations and attitudes to school; in-school effects and the culture of hegemonic masculinity. Finally I review those studies that document the educational success that has been achieved by some working class students both in North America and England.

The chapter's fundamental argument is that educational success has been and still is highly atypical for white working class males and those who do achieve, do so against the odds.

White working class boys and academic attainment

Many studies have pointed to the low academic achievement of white working class boys in Great Britain. Hills, Brewer, Jenkins, Lister, Lupton et al's (2010) study for the National Equity Panel reported that white British boys were the *lowest academic achievers* of any ethnic group at age 16. They achieved the least number of passes at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) of any ethnic group (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; The Centre for Social Justice, 2013). 'Nearly half the low achievers are white British males. White British students – boys and girls - are more likely than other ethnic groups to persist in low achievement' (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007, p. xi).

In 2007 white British boys made up **46.83%** of the school population achieving *no* GCSE passes as shown in Table 1:1 and Table 1:2 highlights the fact that white British boys comprised **48.72%** of the school population achieving no passes above grade D in 2007.

Graph 1:1 illustrates that from the age of 11 the academic performance of white British boys on free school meals (FSM) appears to decline through their school careers whereas black Caribbean boys and the white British girls on FSM show a decline in academic performance to the age of 14 and then begin to show an improvement from the age of 14 to 16 (Hill et al., 2010). Graph1:1 also shows that white British boys are the lowest achievers at 16 for any ethnic and gender grouping.

Table 1:1 Distribution of low achievers (no GCSE passes) by ethnicity & gender

Ethnicity	N	Girls	N	Boys	N	Total
		% of grand total		% of grand total		% of grand total
Bangladeshi	96	0.30	147	0.47	243	0.77
Indian	133	0.42	192	0.61	325	1.03
Pakistani	227	0.72	408	1.29	635	2.01
Asian Other	88	0.28	96	0.30	184	0.58
African	323	1.02	311	0.99	634	2.01
Caribbean	191	0.61	354	1.12	545	1.73
Black Other	72	0.23	113	0.36	185	0.59
Chinese	38	0.12	52	0.16	90	0.29
Mixed ethnicity	165	0.52	236	0.75	401	1.27
Ethnicity	1,192	3.78	1,758	5.58	2,950	9.36
White British	9,650	30.60	14,767	46.83	24,417	77.44
White Traveller	41	0.13	36	0.11	77	0.24
White Other	314	1.00	531	1.68	845	2.68
Total	12,53	39.74	19,001	60.26	31,53	100.00

Table 1:2 Distribution of low achievers (no passes above grade D), by ethnicity and gender

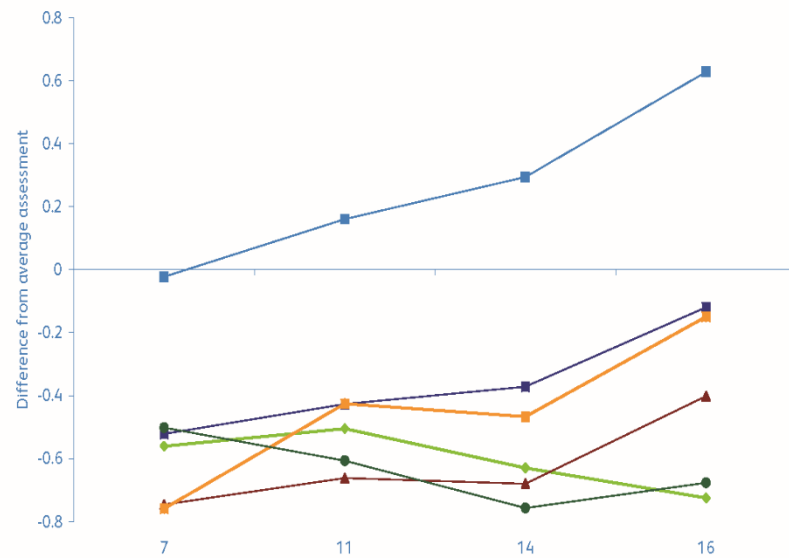
Ethnicity	N	Girls	N	Boys	N	Total
		% of grand total		% of grand total		% of grand total
Bangladeshi	438	0.30	871	0.60	1,309	0.91
Indian	637	0.44	1,228	0.85	1,865	1.29
Pakistani	1,297	0.90	2,526	1.75	3,823	2.65
Asian Other	213	0.15	341	0.24	554	0.38
African	988	0.69	1,321	0.92	2,309	1.60
Caribbean	1,146	0.80	1,827	1.27	2,973	2.06
Black Other	323	0.22	563	0.39	886	0.61
Chinese	69	0.05	121	0.08	190	0.13
Mixed ethnicity	626	0.43	886	0.61	1,512	1.05
Ethnicity	3,954	2.74	6,479	4.50	10,433	7.24
White British	45,497	31.58	70,189	48.72	115,686	80.30
White Traveller	101	0.07	89	0.06	190	0.13
White Other	827	0.57	1,510	1.05	2,337	1.62
Total	56,116	38.95	87,951	61.05	144,067	100.00

Source: Table 1:1 and Table 1:2 from Cassen and Kingdon (2007, p. 66)

Graph 1:1 Differences from average assessments: Children on free school meals (England)

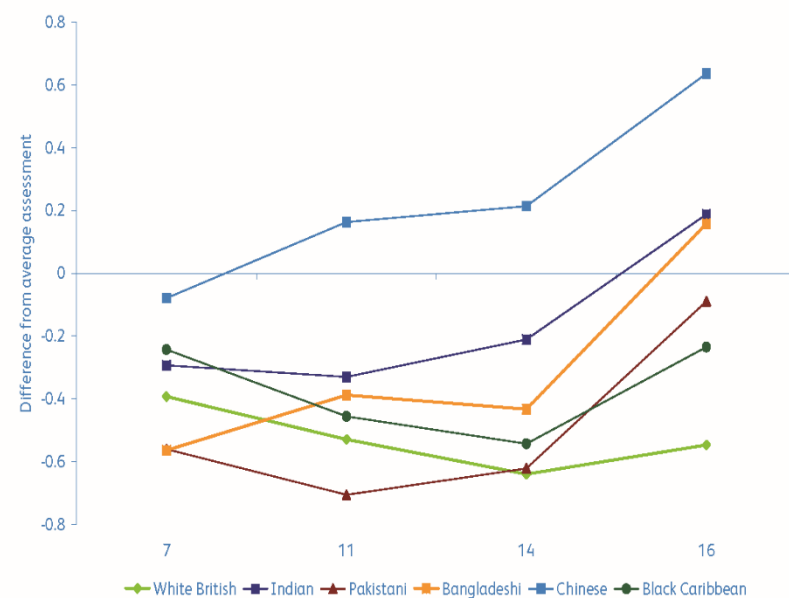
(a) Boys

White British and Black Caribbean boys who receive Free School Meals fall further behind through secondary school



(b) Girls

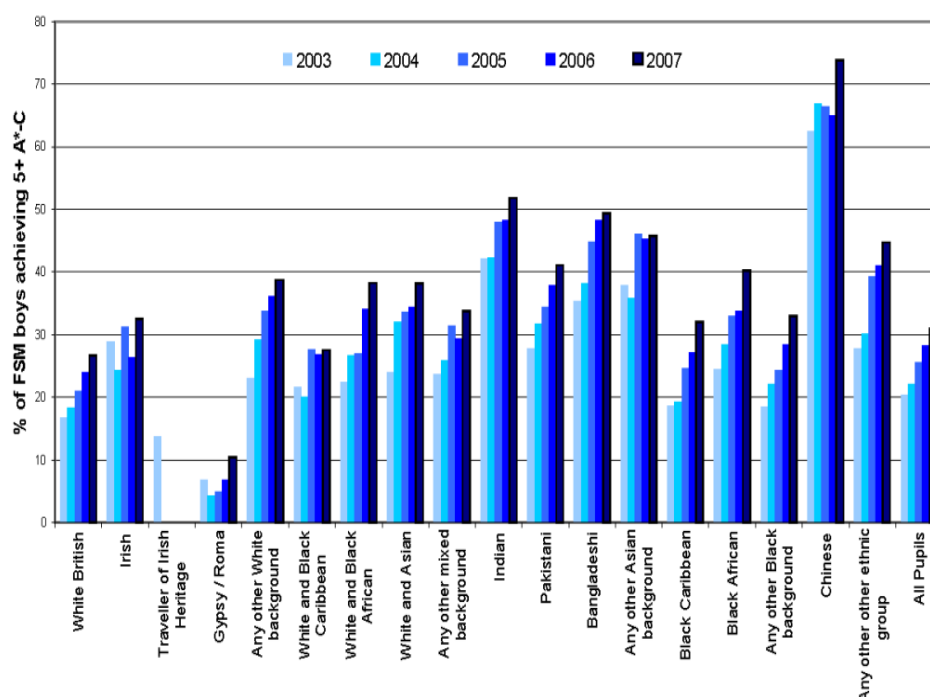
Girls receiving Free School Meals from most ethnic backgrounds improve their results between 14 and 16, but White British girls on Free School Meals remain well behind



Source: Burgess, Wilson and Worth (2009), figures 6a and 6b. Results for the cohort of children aged 16 in 2007 (aged 7 in 1998). The vertical scale shows the difference between the average score for a group and the overall average at that age, expressed as a proportion of the standard deviation of scores at that age.

In their report 'Deprivation and Education (2009) the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) found that 'Apart from Gypsy/Roma and Traveller of Irish heritage groups, white British free school meal (FSM) boys were the lowest attaining group every year from 2003 to 2007' (p. 47) with less than 30% of them achieving 5 or more A* to C GCSE grades as can be seen from graph 1:2.

Graph 1:2: Percentage of FSM boys achieving 5+A*-C at GCSE and equivalent in 2003-2007 by ethnicity



Source: DCSF analysis of children recorded in the School Census for 2003-2007, who attended maintained mainstream secondary schools, including Academies and CTCs.

In numerical terms in 2006/07, of the almost 650,000 children sitting their GCSE exams, over 70,000 of them were white working class males who achieved no passes above D grade and a further 45,500 were white working class girls

who achieved no GCSE passes above D grade. These statistics represent a cohort coming through the education system of over 115,000 white working class students each year who underachieve academically. These findings indicate that males from white working class backgrounds are the lowest academic achievers in this country at age 16 with the white working class girls not far behind (other than the 190 traveller children who achieved no GCSE passes above a D grade).

In this section I have focussed on national data available for the year 2006/7. This is because examination data takes some time to be made available and when I started my study this was the most up to date set. My point here is mainly indicative and illustrative; classed and gendered attainment is a well-established pattern that persists to this day (Strand, 2014).

What does class mean?

Now I want to turn to the concept of 'class' and its relationship to educational inequality as it is pivotal to my research based on the academic experiences of a group of young men who identity as being 'working class'.

One key issue is that class is a highly contested concept. For example, in 1995 Pakulski & Waters wrote 'The Death of Class' asserting that in postmodern society there have been significant changes to the basis on which inequalities are distributed and that social class was no longer useful in explaining this pattern. However, Ball argues that while there have been economic changes that 'have made class more permeable... class remains a key factor in the explanation of inequality' (2003, p. 17) and Reay & Ball maintain that the Pakulski & Waters argument is 'premised on a denial of the working class experience' (1997, p. 90). The problem has been that the term *class* is difficult to

describe as it does not reflect any observable attributes, unlike other forms of social stratification such as ethnicity, age and gender (Stevenson & Lang, 2010). Consequently, there is a lack of consensus as to how it should be understood and measured (Bottero, 2009).

Social class has, in the past, been linked to one's employment (Goldthorpe, 1980; Wright, 1980) and many researchers still use either Goldthorpe's occupational groupings of class, or, the Office of National Statistics' (ONS) National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SeC) as their main tool for classifying the population according to occupation (see Appendix A). However recently some sociologists have argued that 'this occupationally based class schema does not effectively capture the role of social and cultural processes in generating class divisions' (Savage, Devine, Cunningham, Taylor, Li et al, 2013, p. 220).

Currently there is tension between seeing social class as a structural and material phenomenon related to occupational status and earnings and in seeing class as a cultural formation. For example, how would we classify a highly qualified theologian who earns a meagre stipend? As Bottero claims the 'concept of 'class' remains, notoriously slippery' (2004, p. 999). She acknowledges that the cultural approach taken by some sociologists when discussing class has introduced important new insights into the subject, but she maintains that the term 'class' should be used when 'perceptions of social identity and social division have been created in specifically 'economic terms'' (2004, p. 1000). A decade later, Bradley argues that an emphasis on cultural factors underplays the various forms of economic capital which she, like

Bottero, claims underpin class configurations. Bradley maintains that whilst social and cultural capital have a crucial part to play in the reproduction of class dynamics, 'the relations of the economy are still the basic shapers of that dynamic' (Bradley, 2014, p. 434).

My point here is that class is a complicated construct; made even more slippery in terms of whether it is understood objectively (in terms of status/income) or subjectively (in terms of how people self-recognize or feel) or some combination of both.

However, while it may be part of common-sense discourse to classify people as being of a working class background if their work is semi-skilled and/or if they have no more than school leaving levels of qualifications, class is a little more complicated. It is a heterogeneous category so there will be class/ethnic differences. Families who move to the UK from other parts of the world may occupy a working class profile but hold middle class aspirations due to their origins and backgrounds. The white working classes may be internally differentiated too so that a community in rural working class Norfolk may be very different from an urban working class council estate (Maguire, 2005).

Thus, in my study, I take class as being intimately related to income/status as well as self-perception. The young men in my study agreed to participate as they self-recognised as coming from a working class background.

Educational under-achievement of working class boys and socio-cultural factors

Over the years there has been much questioning as to why many boys from

working class backgrounds fail to achieve academically and research suggests that the relationship between working class boys and school achievement is far from straight forward (Power, Whitty, Edwards & Wigfall, 1998). However researchers have highlighted various contributory factors to this academic under-achievement which I now explore.

This section is designed to present and critically explore the significant literature that has dealt with trying to explain why it is that (white) working class males seem to do less well in their academic attainment. There is a longstanding and broad literature and in order to render this more manageable and for this reason I have grouped these explanations into four broad and somewhat overlapping categories: family influences; working class students' aspirations and attitudes to school, in-school effects and the culture of hegemonic masculinity. In the first category I group the notion of parental choice of schooling and the effects school choice may have on the academic achievements of children. I examine working class attachment to locality and how this may influence academic achievement. The second category considers white working class academic aspirations and how these are influenced by school experiences. My third group of factors explores in-school effects which includes the concept of the 'mis-recognition' of white working class students (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008). The fourth category examines research that explores the culture of hegemonic masculinities among working class boys such as laddish behaviour, interest in football, peer pressure and dominant youth culture.

Family Influences

Parental Choice

Hatcher and Jones (2011) suggest that in an educational system based on the parental choice of schools, those with the necessary cultural capital make 'good' educational choices and others are left on the margins (see also Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995). When parents choose the schools that their children attend there appears to be a tendency for children from the same socio-economic backgrounds to go to the same schools. Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe (1995), Ball (2003) and Gewirtz & Cribb, (2009) suggest that through the exercise of school choice, parents may maintain and reinforce educational inequalities. This is because 'the middle classes can use their social and cultural skills and capital advantages to good use' (Ball, 2008, p. 133), choosing schools they consider suit their children's needs and where the student intake is predominantly middle class. Research conducted by Burgess, Briggs, McConnell & Slater (2006) using the national Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), which covers all students in England, found that parental choice actually led to what they saw as more segregation in class and ethnic terms. They found that more affluent parents have the resources to live near 'better' schools or to transport their children to 'better' schools. The system does not however appear to be working well for less well-off families (Burgess et al., 2006) and whose children tend to be located in less 'successful' schools.

According to Allen, Burgess & McKenna (2014), social class is instrumental in shaping how parents interact with the process of school choice and middle class advantage comes through the possession of the 'right' form of economic, social

and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). The process of choosing schools in England requires time, skill, effort and sometimes expense (Allen et al, 2014) and Ball suggests that the 'education market with all its risks is well accommodated to the dispositions and interests of the middle class (2003, p.173). Middle class parents, according to Ball, also have a specific view of what constitutes a 'good' school. The criteria being test scores that are good and a peer group that comes from a similar background to themselves.

Parents from working class backgrounds engage with the school choice process differently as Reay & Ball (1997) discovered. They suggest that: 'working class patterns of educational choice are characterised by ambivalence, and appear to be as much about the avoidance of anxiety, failure and rejection as they are about 'choosing a school for my child'' (Reay & Ball, 1997, p. 93). This ambivalence, according to Reay and Ball, is to do with a working class view that children's characteristics are fixed and something the school cannot change. The avoidance factor they suggest is about avoiding the potentially negative results of attending what they see as a middle class school. To choose this type of school 'could set working class children up to fail in individualised, publicly humiliating ways in predominantly middle class schools' (Reay & Ball, 1997, p. 97).

This means that, when choosing a school, working class parents may not necessarily prioritise exam results but rely more 'on 'gut feeling'/intuition or favouring a sense of 'being at home'' (Allen et al, 2014, p. 18). According to Coldron, Cripps & Shipton, 2010, working class parents value the presence of children like their own which leads to them opting for a form of class

segregation. Working class parents also more often allow their children to make the choice of which school to attend (Coldron & Boulton, 1991). These choices could, in middle class terms, be described as 'bad choices', but as Ball & Reay (1997) explain, this is entirely a cultural judgement.

Allen et al., suggest that the choices made by working class parents are also tempered by economic circumstances, their decision-making being 'a rational adjustment to a structural lack of options' (2014, p. 19). For many working class parents choice is not always an option, the only choice available to them is that of choosing a school near to where they live. As Reay & Ball explain:

Far from being ill considered, this reluctance (to go to middle class schools) represents a powerful common-sense logic in which to refuse to choose what is not permitted offers a preferable option to choices which contain the risk of humiliation and rejection (1997, p. 91).

Thus, a number of studies have found that working class parents operate within a framework of limited choices. These limitations can be the result of economic as well as cultural constraints. It has also been posited that, for many working class people, the locality in which they live provides security and familiarity and this attachment to locality is now explored.

Working class attachment to locality

Archer, Hollingworth & Mendick (2010) found that working class people are often very strongly attached to the familiar and have strong friendships and family ties in their local areas. Their identity is frequently bound up with the

locality in which they live (Archer & Yamashita, 2003). According to Ingram (2009), for working class boys, this sense of belonging within a locality brings with it a sense of security. She found that locality, identity and educational success were connected for the boys in her study and stepping outside of their geographical locality was a difficult negotiation. Ball, Maguire & Macrae (2000) also found that the young people in their study were firmly attached to their locality. Some never left their neighbourhood to participate in either social activities or work opportunities. This limited the scope and type of work available to them, but familiarity with the local, and the feeling of comfort and safety their locality provided was of more importance than other considerations. In Archer & Yamashita's (2003) and Ingram's (2009) studies many working class boys were critical of their local neighbourhood for various reasons such as its lack of amenities, level of deprivation, level of crime and danger. Despite these negative descriptions the boys remained committed to their locality.

While this attachment to locality brings with it a sense of belonging and a strong social network it may also bring with it conformity and the restrictions that this conformity brings. As a participant in Ingram's study put it, 'if you are different you get abused' (Andy, in Ingram, 2009, p. 428). This commitment to the local may mean that these young men may not apply to university as this may require living away from home, something they cannot envisage. For some people from working class families and communities, moving out of their locality, could mean breaking ties with those with whom they share many life experiences and values and the disjuncture this could cause may outweigh any

benefits that may be obtained from moving elsewhere (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000).

In their study in an area they named 'Arrowfields' in Liverpool, Allen, Casey & Hickman (2006) employed a concept of 'residential habitus' which they 'understood to be a scheme of perceptions and set of inclinations toward residence' (p. 22). The researchers identified two mobility classes that they named the 'located habitus' and the 'cosmopolitan habitus'. The former 'consisted of an orientation to residence that was firmly located within the social and economic landscape that enveloped it' (Allen et al., 2006, p. 24). This class, the located habitus, consisted of working class households who tended to live close to where they worked. As children they went to the primary and secondary schools local to them and most left school as soon as they could to go to work. The jobs they took on were more about what was available at the time and work was about being able to pay the bills. There appeared to be no thought of career structure and the immediate satisfaction of needs was the driving force (Allen et al., 2006).

In the study those termed 'located respondents' had a strong sense of the social with a strong sense of 'we' and 'being with others in the same socio-economic position' (Allen et al., 2006, p. 25). Schooling appeared to be valued only because of the friendships developed there and most friends appeared to be life-long. The 'locatedness' of home was of emotional importance to the respondents as it was where family and friends lived and while Arrowfields had a 'bad' reputation this was not their experience, it did not directly impact them (Allen et al., 2006). For some working class people an attachment to locality is

all encompassing as it provides them with emotional security and sense of belonging.

White working class students' aspirations and attitudes to school

White working class aspirations, or lack of, have often been cited as a contributory factor in the academic underachievement by many in this cohort and in this section I examine a number of studies that have explored the educational aspirations of working class children. In their study on working class boys' attitudes and engagement with school, Mills & Gale (2011) suggest that working class boys' malaise toward education occurs because they can see the limitations of education for themselves. From their understanding, the school 'cannot manufacture employment for their graduating students' (p. 250), they have seen and continue to see the intergenerational underemployment experienced in their families; and they also feel the need to demonstrate loyalty to their fathers. These factors act as strong educational 'detractors' and according to Mills & Gale (2011), the boys become entrenched in the past and unable to adapt to the current educational and work order; in response they cling to a culture of hegemonic masculinities.

Strand & Wilson (2008) conducted a study on students' educational aspirations in inner London schools. They asked eight hundred 12-14 year olds across five inner London comprehensive secondary schools to complete a questionnaire assessing the students' experiences of home, school and with their peers. Their findings revealed that white British children had the lowest educational aspirations of any ethnic group. These lower academic aspirations seemed to correspond with having lower academic self-concepts and lower educational aspirations in the home. The parents of white working class boys, in this study,

appeared to be reticent to encourage high educational aspirations in their children because they saw such aspirations as unrealistic. They did not want their children to experience feelings of failure and disappointment if their aspirations were not realised. The researchers also found that white working class British children did not necessarily have a negative attitude to schooling, they just viewed it as irrelevant to their vocational aspirations. Their educational aspirations were set at lower levels than those children from other ethnic backgrounds.

A study by Croll, Attwood, Fuller & Last (2008) reported on students' attitudes to school; based on a questionnaire survey of 845 students in their first year of secondary school. They found that most students understand the importance of doing well at school but, in spite of the tacit understanding of the need to achieve academic success, some students still doubted the personal value of school to themselves. Students from working class backgrounds were 'heavily over-represented' among the group that saw little relevance of school to themselves (p. 397). While these students understood the importance of doing well at school, their desire to leave school came about because they were not enjoying school. They did not feel that the school was committed to them and they doubted the relevance of school to them personally. Their overarching belief was that 'the school does not offer them much' and those students who felt that school had little to offer them had often had negative academic experiences (p. 398).

Stahl (2014) conducted a study in which he explored how white working class boys in south London reconstituted their learner-identities within the 'raising aspirations' discourse. He explained that the boys in his study had what would

be considered low or modest aspirations in relation to the neo-liberal discourse prevalent in the UK about the need for high educational aspirations which students were expected to buy into. This discourse, according to Davies & Bansel, values 'self-reliance, autonomy and self-advancement' (2007, p. 252). Stahl found that the boys in his study identified with the concept of a 'good life' and they had developed:

a counter-habitus of egalitarianism which was evidenced in the boys' attention to 'loyalty to self' as well as average-ness, ordinariness and 'middling' never wanting to be the best or worst (2013, p. 90).

Stahl goes on to suggest that the boys in his study saw aspiration towards academic success both beyond their grasp and also beyond their desire (Stahl, 2015). The individual (the white working class boy) will in this case set himself a level of aspiration which is determined by the probability of achieving the set goal.

According to Stahl (2015, p. 160) the boys 'egalitarian habitus, as a counter-habitus, represents a set of strategies or agentic practices to generate value' (Stahl, 2015, p. 160). The boys had aspirations, according to Stahl, but these aspirations were mediated by what they saw as the realistic opportunities available to them and their school experiences. Stahl's study revealed that there is a difference 'between having aspirations and lacking aspiration' (2012, p. 10). However, all these studies suggest that many white working class young men

are not engaging with education. Each study highlights different factors that contribute to working class boys academic underachievement; it appears as if many white working class young men have had negative educational experiences which could explain their apparent lack of academic aspiration. It is difficult to aspire to something that appears beyond reach, beyond one's perceived abilities. As Reay argues, education by and large remains a place where many working class children feel 'powerlessness and educational worthlessness' (2009, p. 25). She goes on to explain that this applies particularly to white working class boys.

In-school effects

Another major factor that has been identified in research studies on working class boys' lack of attainment is to do with 'in-school effects'. Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie (2003) argue that in schools serving disadvantaged areas, 'low expectations and aspirations for student achievements are often endemic features of school cultures' (p. 132). Mills and Gale (2011) also found that the stances taken by teachers working in disadvantaged areas do not always serve their students' best interests. They argue that teachers seem to reinforce the belief that economically disadvantaged students are not academically inclined. This 'misrecognition' by teachers and schools can result in students feeling devalued within the school system. Siraj-Blatchford, Mayo, Melhuish, Taggart, Sammons & Sylva (2011) in their Effective Provision of Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 3-16) study of 3000+ children found that students who were seen as not particularly clever by teachers developed negative learner identities, whereas those students who were seen as clever were

continually reinforced by teachers and parents and developed positive learner identities.

'Misrecognition' was also reported by Dunne & Gazely, (2008) in their study on teachers, social class and underachievement. They interviewed 22 year nine teachers who discussed a total of 327 students; school records for these students were also collected. The teachers identified 27% of these students – 88 in number - as underachieving. According to the school data, the underachieving students were actually from the full range of attainment as measured by Cognitive Ability Tests and National Curriculum Tests. Dunne and Gazely (2008) argue that, 'although it was seldom explicitly acknowledged, teachers' tacit recognition of pupils' social class positions was a key factor in their constructions of pupil underachievement' (p. 452). Teachers tended to accept as 'normal' the underachievement of working class children. This is of major concern because students who are labelled low achievers very early in their academic careers may well experience a pattern of underachievement that continues throughout their time at school. Early success appears to be crucial to the students' belief in their own academic ability and Strand & Winston (2008) suggest that the early nurturing of positive attitudes to school increases academic self-concept and retention rates at school. However, the low achievers tend to disproportionately be from a working class background (DfES, 2006).

Dunne & Gazely, (2008) reported that teachers tended to suggest that it was the students who were the problem rather than the curriculum or their own beliefs. This misrecognition of working class children by schools and teachers appears to be a contributory factor in their academic underachievement.

Another set of factors which have also been cited as contributing to working class young men's academic underachievement relates to various cultures of masculinity which may work to depress academic achievement for working class males. Cultures of masculinities can take many forms which are explored in the next section and I begin with a brief description of hegemonic masculinity.

Cultures of hegemonic masculinities

According to Connell (2005) hegemonic masculinity is a form of masculinity that is high status at any one time, is a rarely attainable form of masculinity aspired to by groups of boys/men (Mills, 2001), is the standard against which boys/men measure their own manliness (Kimmel, 2008) and involves behaving in certain ways.

Cultures of hegemonic masculinity often displace any pro-school sentiments and were initially associated with white working class boys by Willis (1977). His influential ethnographic study of 12 white working class boys in the Midlands, put the academic underachievement of these boys down to what he called 'a form of male chauvinism' (p. 52). This male chauvinism reflected itself in a number of ways which included: a negative attitude to school and learning in particular; insubordination to those in authority; a rejection of those boys they called 'ear'oles' (Willis, 1977, p. 13) (ear'holes being those boys who showed an interest in education) and their way of dressing. Clothes were an important symbol to these boys and they dressed according to contemporary 'youth culture (Willis, 1977, p. 17); exerting a certain amount of physical

violence, and, showing a certain degree of sexism (Willis, 1977). It must be remembered that Willis carried out his study in the mid-1970's and used a relatively small sample size of just twelve. Nevertheless the work did create the first awareness of how working class young men can generate a culture that leads them into working class jobs.

Archer & Yamashita (2003) argue that, for working class males, their clothing along with their speech and way of walking are important defining features of their identity and, more specifically, their masculinity. Many working class males use style, which, can include the wearing of certain types of clothing, listening to a particular genre of music and the use of specific language, to achieve acceptance among their peer group (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). 'Thus successful performances of style (can generate) currency and status within peer groups and afford 'safety' from bullying and marginalisation' (Archer, Hollingsworth & Mendick, 2010, p. 36).

Clothing, style swagger and music blend into a culture that privileges a dominance that cannot be achieved in schools for these young men.

Opposition to the school is principally manifested in the struggle to win symbolic and physical space from the institution and its rules and to defeat its main perceived purpose; to make you work (Willis, 1977, p. 26).

These young men saw education as being for 'girls' and physical work as being the 'real thing'. Their form of hegemonic masculinity enabled them to construct a form of cultural capital that compensated for, but at the same time contributed to, their educational failure (Power et al., 1998).

Other studies have also pointed to cultures of masculinity negatively influencing school outcomes among working class boys (Reay, 2002; Dalley-Trim, 2007; Smith, 2007). In the Australian context, Connell (1989) suggests that, for some working class males, their school experiences alienate them completely from education. They are compelled to be at school and are faced with what they see as an authority structure that they disassociate from and rebel against. Connell (1989) argues that this rebellion is a reaction by those boys who have experienced failure within the school system. This failure has resulted in them needing to find another source of power; that of a masculinity manifested in such things as sporting prowess, physical aggression and sexual conquest. As with Willis' lads (1977) these young men see themselves as the 'cool guys' (Connell, 1989, p. 295) and those boys who are more academic are seen as effeminate. Connell (1989) concludes by stating that:

It is the inexplicit, indirect effects of the way schools work that stands out in the long perspective on masculinity formation. A stark case is the way streaming and 'failure' push groups of working-class boys towards alienation, and state authority provides them a perfect foil for the construction of a combative, dominance-focused masculinity (p. 300).

Reay (2002) also refers to a dominant form of masculinity that she sees as operating among young working class boys. She too found that these young men's perception of education was that it was 'feminine'. She suggests that 'it is white working-class young men who have the strongest sense that their

masculinities are under siege, and this has consequences for their defensive practices' (p. 232).

The 15 year old white working class boys, from a large secondary school on the north east coast of England in Smith's (2007) study also tenaciously held on to a 'version of working class manliness that points young men away from schoolwork and towards an identity of muscular masculine prowess that ill prepares them for a deindustrialized future' (p. 183). Smith (2007) reports that the young men in his study also interpreted school work and mental activity as 'feminine'. They saw education as being the diametric opposite of manual labour which was what 'real' men did. Any male who showed an interest in education became the target of homophobic taunting.

Dalley-Trim (2007), drawing on research conducted in two co-educational secondary classrooms in Australia, examines the way some groups of boys take up positions of dominance within their respective classrooms:

The 'doing' of hegemonic masculinity, the 'right' type of masculinity, provided these boys with power... Their 'power' in terms of the dominance assumed by and afforded to them, was blatantly obvious in their interactions with other members of their respective class... and (they) saw all *others* rendered silent and marginal (Dalley-Trim, 2007, p.212-213).

These hegemonic masculinities are often constructed in and acted out within peer groups.

Peer Groups

Peer groups can provide a sense of belonging and support. They may also influence the individual with regard to attitudes to schooling, behaviour and academic outcomes (Willis, 1977; Sherriff, 2007). The peer group can act as an environment in which boys form their identities and act them out (Mac an Ghail, 1994; Connell, 2000; Sherriff, 2007). Any males that do not 'fit into' the group's definition of masculinity become *othered*, as are females (Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Sherriff, 2007). The boys who perform these hegemonic masculinities are able to gain positions of dominance within the classroom.

It is the capacity of the peer milieu to make visible a gender order that encourages boys to pursue the shared enterprise of hyper-masculinity making characterized by physical domination, aggression and a competitive 'macho' bravado that denigrates females and anything considered 'feminine' (Smith, 2007, p. 184).

Thus, 'hyper-masculinity' or 'hegemonic masculinity' nurtured in the peer group may produce an attitude in some young working class boys that constructs some things, such as being good at sport, as masculine and other things, such as academic study, as feminine - an argument that is evidenced in many of the educational studies dealing with working class males.

Working Class Boys and Football

Several studies have explored young working class males' interest in football and have suggested that football is much more important to many young men

than almost anything else including education. For example, Francis (1999) was told by the working class boys in her study that they were distracted by other things that meant that they paid less attention to education. She found that the most frequently mentioned 'other' thing was football: if the boys were not talking about football they were playing it. In another study, Power et al., (1998) found that for working class boys: 'Sporting prowess not only compensated for working hard, it could also provide an alternative or even more 'successful' identity' (p. 141). From the viewpoint of their peers, the boys who were good at football were seen as 'cool' and 'hard'. This reputation gained them the respect of their peers which was much more important to them than gaining recognition through academic achievement (Power et al., 1998). Footballing prowess was also seen by the boys in Smith's (2007) study as being the ultimate 'prestige resource in signifying 'successful' masculinity' (p. 186) and those boys who were seen to excel at football earned 'physical capital' (Smith, 2007, p.186).

In my MA study on academically successful white working class men (Travers, 2011) I was told by Chris, one of the academically successful white working class participants, that he felt very strongly that the major reason why many white working class boys did not succeed academically was because they held aspirations of being the next 'Beckham' or 'Rooney'. These boys, according to Chris spent their time focusing on football as opposed to academic study. However, very few young white working class young men actually become professional footballers and when they realise that their aspiration to become footballer has not materialised these young white working class men find themselves without a football career and without any educational qualifications.

They then discover, as Shilling (1991) (drawing on Bourdieu, 1978) explains, that the possibility of converting 'physical capital' into economic capital is limited.

Laddish Behaviour

The term 'lads' was used extensively by Willis (1977) when describing the white working class boys in his study and it has, since that time, been associated with the portrayal of working class boys and their rejection of academic learning in favour of manual work (Smith, 2007). The term 'lad' according to Francis (1999, p. 357) evokes the image of:

a young exclusively male group and the hedonist practices popularly associated with such groups (for example, 'having a laugh', alcohol consumption, disruptive behaviour, objectifying women, and an interest in pastimes and subjects constructed as masculine).

This idea of 'male 'laddishness' (and its associated 'bad' behaviour) has frequently been put forward as a possible explanation for working class boys' underachievement at school (Jackson, 2010). These 'lads' identify with 'popular culture, music, the local area and gendered, classed and racialized relationships' This 'laddish' or 'bad boy' behaviour is 'antithetical to the 'good student' identity, educational attainment, schoolwork and effort' (Archer & Yamashita, 2003, p. 127).

It has been suggested that 'laddish' behaviour may be enacted to protect the self and social worth of the boys that partake in it. 'Laddish' behaviour may be

prompted by both a fear of failure and a 'fear of the feminine' (Jackson, 2003, p. 583). Jackson goes on to suggest that this laddish behaviour has a dual purpose: 'it enables boys to act in ways currently consistent with hegemonic forms of masculinity in their schools (and) it provides as excuse for failure and augments success' (2003, p. 595).

Thus far, I have considered some of the socio-economic factors that have been identified in previous research studies that have arguably contributed towards the academic underachievement of white working class young men but what constitutes academic success? This will be considered in the following section.

Academic success

I will begin by considering what the Department for Education (2013) considers to be academic success for students. The Department's major public benchmark of academic success for school children is achieving a minimum of 5 A* to C grades at GCSE level (General Certificate of Secondary Education). This grading occurs at the end of year 11, assessment takes two forms for each subject: coursework completed through Year 11, and examinations which are taken at the end of Year 11 when students are normally 16 years of age. Students can leave school after these examinations but since September 2015 it has become compulsory for all young people to stay in some form of education or training till their 18th birthday. The options available to young people on completing year 11 are: to remain in fulltime education at school or college; enrol in an apprenticeship or traineeship programme; enrol in part-time education or training as well as being employed, self-employed or volunteering for 20 hours or more a week (GOV.UK, 2014). There does not appear to be any form of

formal assessment necessary after the GCSE examinations so these examinations remain as the UK government's major indicator of academic success or failure at school.

In her study on academically successful black pupils, Rollock (2006) found that teachers were deploying two versions of academic success with their students: one she labelled *exclusive* success that involved the acquisition by students of five or more A* to C grades at GCSE level. The second version of academic success she called *inclusive* success which was about the individual student reaching their potential. This second version of success was related to those students the teachers regarded as incapable of *exclusive* academic success. According to Rollock (2006) these two forms of academic success were used by the teachers in a hierarchical way and tended to include and exclude certain students according to various factors such as gender, family size and composition, ethicised student subcultures and perceptions about ability.

Archer (2008b), conceptualizes the constructions of success in play in schools in a different way. Using data collected from four studies she had previously undertaken, she identified four types of academic success. The first she labelled '*traditional*' academic success and she defines it as the 'gold standard' of achievement in national examinations. The dominant groups seen to achieve this level of traditional academic success are white middle class children, Chinese and some South Asia pupils. In contrast, the second type of academic success Archer described as '*good enough*' academic success. The students who achieve this middle level of academic achievement - B's and C's - are seen as unspectacular and unproblematic. This group includes Black girls, some South

Asian pupils, some Chinese boys and some working class students (mainly girls).

Archer's third classification is '*value added*' academic success and reflects average levels of achievement reached from lower starting points. Students achieving at this level are seen as realising their potential. Working class students (mainly girls), some Muslim students, some Black girls, refugees and those with English as a second language (SEN) are to be found in this grouping.

Archer has an additional category which she has called '*desire denied*' and '*potential*' academic success. The students falling into this category have 'a relationship to success in the absence of a recognized current/actual level of examination achievement' (Archer, 2008b, p. 92). This descriptor relates to students who are seen to be underperforming in terms of their academic ability and potential for academic attainment. This group is considered problematic by schools and encompasses working class students (including white working class boys), Black boys and girls, Muslim boys, SEN students and refugees.

Archer explains 'that there are multiple possible performances of, or relationships to 'success'' She found that there were many examples of students either performing, trying to perform and/or wanting educational success but finding themselves 'being differently positioned by educational professionals and parents in relation to notions of success'. She believes that for many ethnic minority students the ability to be academically successful and to be seen as an 'ideal pupil' (Archer, 2008b, p. 92) is almost impossible. Perceptions of these minorities held by educational authorities and some working class parents,

excludes the possibility that these students can have academic successful identities. There is, according to Archer, a misrecognition of these pupils. As discussed earlier, Ingram (2009) also found that misrecognition played an influential role in the construction of non-success among some of the subjects in her study.

Archer's four categories of academic success are not dissimilar to Rollock's in that, what Archer (2008b) has labelled 'traditional' and 'good enough' academic success fit with Rollock's(2006) description of 'exclusive' success. Archer's 'value added' and 'desire denied and potential' academic success correlate with Rollock's 'inclusive' success. Archer describes the students in this category as:

complexly and variously excluded from the identity of the
'ideal pupil' – (whose) positionings are shaped by
racialized, gendered and classed discourses...'success' is
very much an 'impossible' subject position for minority
ethnic pupils (Archer, 2008b, p. 102).

These two studies highlight the issue of misrecognition by teachers of some students resulting in the expectation these students will not experience academic success. For students from the cohorts teachers do not expect to be successful such as, white working class boys, to experience academic success is 'success against the odds'. However, there is some work that counteracts this set of findings and which starts to document an alternative outcome – 'success against the odds', these are examined in the next section.

The successful negotiation of the education system by some working class students

Four academic studies which focus on academically successful working class students are explored. Two of the studies are US based and focus on academically successful working class students in high school, the other two studies are based in elite universities one in Canada and one in England.

In their three year qualitative study with 18 high-ability, culturally diverse students in an urban high school in the north east of America, Hebert and Reis (1999) found that the factors that enabled the working class students in their study to succeed academically included:

The development of a belief in self, supportive adults, interaction with a network of high achieving peers, extra curricula activities, challenging classes such as honors classes, personal characteristics such as motivation and resilience, and family support (p. 428).

Wright (2011) carried out a study with five academically successful 11th and 12th grade African American male students in the US. He argues that African American male students face negative stereotypes ('misrecognition') which include beliefs that African American males do not engage with school and have low academic ability and achievement. Wright (2011) found that the five academically successful young men in his study achieved success because they did not relate to these stereotypes. Each young men had, what Wright referred to as, a positive racial-ethnic identity which enabled them to successfully

navigate the cultural worlds of home and school, adopting positive attitudes to learning and academic achievement. ‘...the young men developed layered and complex notions of what it means to be African American male, and were successful against the backdrop of having achieved a healthy racial-ethnic identity within a nurturing school environment’ (Wright, 2011, p.1).

In Ontario, Lehmann (2013) conducted a study with 22 working class students attending a research intensive university. These students were the first in their families to go to university, 70% were women and 30% of the total were ethnic minorities. The students in Lehmann’s study experienced not only academic success but had become fully immersed in the social aspects of university life and they considered that their success was due to ‘personal motivation, grit and pluckiness’ (2013, p. 12).

In a study undertaken at an elite UK university by Reay, Crozier & Clayton, (2009) which attempted to understand the complex identities of a group of working class students studying there, found that their sample of nine working class students had:

developed almost superhuman levels of motivation, resilience and determination, sometimes at the cost of peer group approval. They have managed to achieve considerable success as learners and acquire the self-confidence and self-regulation that accompanies academic ***success against the odds*** (p. 1115, my italics).

What these studies on academically successful working class students suggest is

that they share some common characteristics, and achieve despite and *against the odds*. The students appeared to be highly motivated, confident and open about their academic achievements. Some of them came from families that had high aspirations for their children. Peer groups were important where they reinforced the same values as the achievers. Early school success appeared to be important as did being mentored at some time in their school careers. Thus, there do seem to be factors that contribute towards the academic success of working class males.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have documented the academic (under)achievement of young white boys from a working class background. Statistics that I started with highlight that white working class boys are indeed the lowest academic performers, as judged by GCSE qualifications, of any ethnic and gender grouping and the largest cohort in numerical terms.

I have explored the factors that may contribute to this academic underachievement as they appear in the published research studies, and it seems that white working class boys find their paths to academic success littered with obstacles. This may begin early in their academic careers. Their parents may not be able to access the so-called 'good' schools that are more readily available to middle class parents. Their local school may not be as focussed on academic success. White working class children appear, from the research, to lack the aspirations needed to succeed academically although the schools working class children attend may not always provide an environment in which they can experience success. Misrecognition by teachers and schools

appears to be a contributory factor in the academic underachievement of children from a working class background and a culture of hegemonic masculinity may set many working class boys against education generally and academic success in particular.

I also explored some work which counteracts these findings and which starts to document an alternative outcome – academic success. But to succeed academically young working class men may well have a high price to pay. The young men have to step out of their peer group, they may be the only ones in their family who choose to strive academically, they may have to forego their attachment to their locality, and as Reay et al (2009, p. 1115) claim, they need to ‘develop almost superhuman levels of motivation, resilience and determination’. All these factors suggest that to achieve academic success as a white working class boy is difficult and those that do, do so *against the odds*.

Chapter Two

Higher Education for All?

...those students from poorer backgrounds who make it to university are likely to be intellectually as well as socially remarkable (Clegg, 2011, p. 95).

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is bring together a set of interrelated aspects of higher education and consider how they relate to working class attendance at university. I will be using the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, field and capital to conceptualize this relationship. More specifically this chapter critically examines the expansion of higher education in England, the growth of different types of higher education institutions and the effect of this expansion on the numbers of white working class students attending different kinds of university. In this chapter I examine the diverse environments in different 'types' of universities, I critically explore how working class students' choose which type of higher education institution to attend, their expectations and transition to higher education as well as their experiences of higher education. White working class young men's access to higher education is analysed as is the active decision, made by some working class students, not to participate in higher education. This chapter provides a backdrop for the critical exploration of the university experiences of the participants in my study.

The massification of higher education in England

In England one of the most dramatic shifts in education has been the expansion in higher education. In the late nineteenth century less than 1% of young people were in higher education; by the late 1950's, this had only increased to 3% (Wolf, 2002). In 1963 Lord Robbins led the Commission on Higher Education which examined higher education in the UK. One of its recommendations was that the number of students at higher education institutions should increase from 216,000 in 1963/4 to 560,000 by 1980/1 (House of Commons Higher Education Committee, 1963).

When the Labour government came to power in 1997 there was a 30% participation rate in higher education. The government (1997-2010) set up a widening participation agenda for higher education with the specific aim of achieving a 50% participation rate for all 18-30 year olds by 2010 and increasing the rate of participation of those who had previously not attended university i.e. the working classes. By 2010/11, the percentage of young people in higher education had grown to 47% or in numerical terms to 1,912,580 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011) (BIS). In 2013/13 there were 1,803,840 undergraduate students attending higher education institutions in the UK and this represents 48% of young people (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2014). This expansion has been referred to as the transformation of higher education from 'elite to mass higher education' (Trow, 1972, p. 61).

However while participation rates rose to 48% of all 18-30 year olds, only 30% of students from NS-SEC classes 4-7 attended university (HESA, 2014)

indicating that the increase in participation had come mainly from the expanding middle classes.

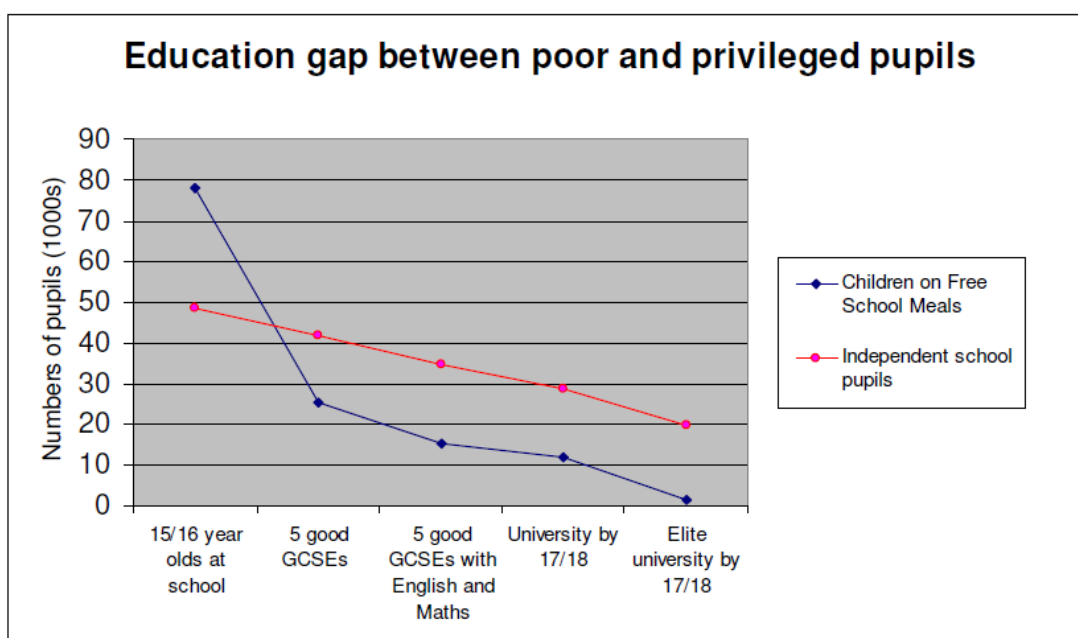
This widening participation policy had been set by the (then) Labour government for economic as well as social reasons. On an economic level the government anticipated that widening participation in higher education would improve the economy at local, regional and national levels which would in turn make the country more competitive on a global level. It was also believed that the development of an individual's personal capabilities would also boost individual prosperity levels (Archer, 2007). On a social level, widening participation in higher education was seen as a means by which disadvantaged social groups could achieve social mobility (DfES, 2003) and specific government initiatives such as Aim Higher were targeted at young working class people to raise their aspirations and academic achievements (Archer, 2007). This growth in the numbers of students attending higher education institutions has, as explained earlier, not been evenly spread across the social classes.

Empirical evidence of a socio-economic gap in higher education participation has been produced using postcode data. Galindo-Rueda, Gutierrez & Vignoles (2004) found that more than 75% of young people whose parents were professionals studied for a degree, compared to just 14% of those whose parents were in unskilled occupations. This finding suggests as Reay, David & Ball (2005) put it that: 'class inequalities of access to universities endure despite the widening participation initiatives designed to attract working class students' (p. 106). The result has been that those young people who the

government is specifically targeting is the group that still remains the least likely to attend university. Figures from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) show that in 2008/09 only 17% of students on free school meals (FSM) entered higher education.

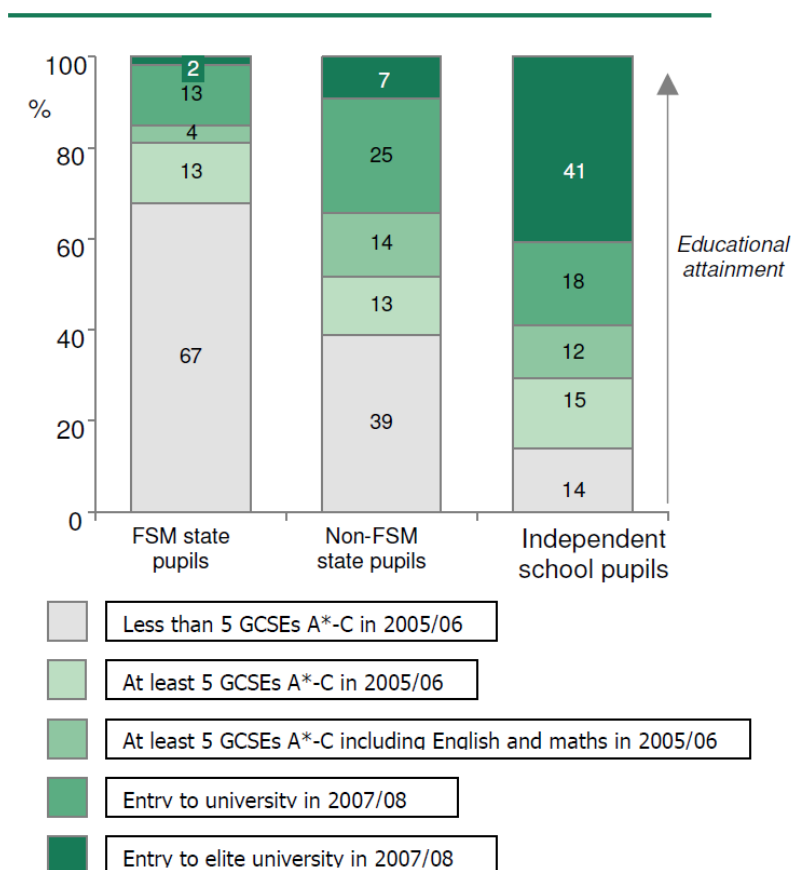
One powerful illustration of the socio-economic gap between university enrolment (in 2007/08) for FSM children and children who have been to independent schools is contained in Graph 2:1. In this period 1.8% of FSM children entered one of the top 30 universities in the UK, referred to here as the ‘Sutton 30’ (see Appendix B), whereas 41% of independently educated students entered one of the universities in this group.

Graph 2:1: Education gap between poor and privileged students (*Source: Sutton Trust, 2010, p. 13*).



Graph 2:2 illustrates the educational attainment of three cohorts of students: those entitled to free school meals at age 15/16; all other pupils in the state system; and those attending independent schools.

Graph 2:2: Education attainment of three cohorts of students (Source: Sutton Trust, 2010, p. 14).



The first column shows the academic attainment of students attending state schools on FSM's, the second column reflects the academic attainment of non-FSM students attending state schools while the final column shows the academic attainment of those students who attended private schools. The graph illustrates the GCSE achievement of all students in the academic year 2005/06 and university entry for 2007/08. It reveals a large disparity in GCSE achievement and university entrance between, in particular, FSM state students and all other school students. More recently the Sutton Trust has claimed that for the academic year 2009/10 'the absolute gap in performance has effectively

remained unchanged' from that of 2005/06 (2010, p. 15). The percentage of FSM students entering the Russell Group of Universities in 2011/12 was only 4% (DfE, 2014) evidence that a large percentage of disadvantaged students are still not accessing the top-rung universities.

The intensification of hierarchy in universities

Along with the massification of higher education has come an intensification in the hierarchy of universities (Brennan & Osborne, 2008) composed of: *elite* universities which are those that are the oldest universities in the country; the *red brick* universities which are those that were built in industrial towns in England at the beginning of the 20th century; the *pre-1992* universities (those universities that were built after the Second World War); and the post-1992 or *modern* universities which were originally polytechnics or colleges of further education. Brennan & Osborne (2008) contend that 'institutional diversity' among the universities reflects differences in such aspects as 'culture, mission, size, subject mix, proportion of residential/commuting students, etc' (p. 181) resulting in students having different university experiences depending on the category of university attended. Furthermore:

students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to attend their local university, to live at home, to have a part-time job and be older than other groups of students. They are less likely to spend time on a wide range of university activities beyond the immediate requirements of study (Brennan & Osborne, 2008, p. 181).

Reay (2004a) also found that working class students who do attend university generally enter a different type of university from their middle class counterparts. She states that 'the relative social and academic worth of universities is a direct consequence of the class positioning of their student bodies' (Reay, 2004a, p. 548). This concept of 'different strokes for different folks' in terms of higher education (Crozier, Reay, Clayton & Colliander, 2008) will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. In my study I will explore the reasons why the young men chose the universities they are attending.

Now I go on to consider Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital and their relevance to understanding working class choice making in the higher education sector. Bourdieu using these concepts explains why those from the same social class generally tend to make similar decision with regard to higher education.

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital

In England, researchers have utilised Bourdieu's concepts of 'cultural' and 'social capital', 'habitus' and 'field' to provide a conceptual framework for understanding and explaining why often students from different social classes choose different types of higher education institution in which to study (Macrae & Maguire, 2002; Crozier et al, 2008; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2010). Reay et al., (2010) also use Bourdieu's concept of 'institutional habitus' to explore the experiences of working class students across the spectrum of universities.

In the 1960's Bourdieu developed his key sociological concepts of cultural capital, field and habitus. They formed the basis of a theoretical framework that he used to understand the structures of the social worlds of individuals and

groups, as well as how these structures were reproduced or transformed (Reay, 2004b). Of these three concepts it is the concept of habitus that 'lies at the heart of Bourdieu's theoretical framework' (Reay, 2004b, p. 431). A more comprehensive explanation of 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' as well as the related concept of 'field' is now undertaken as these concepts form the theoretical framework for my empirical study.

Habitus

Habitus is one of the fundamental concepts in Bourdieusian analysis. Habitus '...is the product of an individual history, but also, through the formative experiences of earliest infancy, of the whole collective history of family and class' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 91).

According to Maton (2008), habitus is structured by one's past and present circumstances which include family upbringing and life experiences. It is 'structuring' as it shapes one's practices both present and future, and it is 'structured' because it is ordered rather than random.

Bourdieu explains that habitus generates within the individual a:

schemata of perceptions and appreciation of practices,
cognitive and evaluative structures that are acquired
through the lasting experiences of a social position...
Habitus thus implies a 'sense of one's place' but also a
'sense of the place of others' (1990b, p. 131).

Habitus according to Maton:

focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how *we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others*. This is an ongoing active process – we are engaged in a continuous process of making history, but not under conditions entirely of our own making (2008, p.52, my italics).

This means that while the individual has choices, the choices made will be shaped by past experiences and context. Current choices will affect future choices as each choice made shapes one's understanding of self and the world at large.

Reay et al (2005), agree that while habitus allows for choice it also predisposes the individual to make particular choices. These choices are:

bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds herself in, her external circumstances. However, within Bourdieu's theoretical framework she is also circumscribed by an internalised framework which makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable (Reay et al., 2005, p. 27).

'The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 54). Thus while an individual's life experiences are unique in their contents, they 'are shared in terms of their *structure* with others of the same

social class, ethnicity, sexuality, occupation, nationality, region and so forth' (Maton, 2008, p. 53).

The concept of habitus has been subject to much criticism because many academics consider it to be somewhat deterministic. Bourdieu (1990b) disputes this claim by explaining that first: habitus relies on field to be enacted and that the same habitus can lead to different practices depending on the state of the field; second: that habitus as the product of history is being constantly transformed either in a way that reinforces it if the experience is in harmony with expectations or in a transforming way when expectations and aspirations are either higher or lower than predicted, and third, habitus can be transformed by encountering situations that lead one to live differently from how one originally lived.

He suggests that while there is a tendency for people from a similar habitus to behave in particular ways there are no rules or principles that control for this. Indeed he argues that 'habitus goes hand in glove with vagueness and indeterminacy' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 77). The logic of habitus is not one of predictability but rather 'that of vagueness, of more-or-less, which defines one's ordinary relation to the world' (1990b, p. 78). However, Bourdieu (1990b) maintains that individuals sometimes exclude themselves from certain practices that are unfamiliar to the cultural grouping to which they belong or that they consider beyond their reach. For example, a working class student may reject the possibility of applying to an elite university because they consider it not appropriate for 'people like us', they reject the possibility as 'unthinkable' (Bourdieu, 1990b). He argues that the dispositions that make up

an individual's habitus are products of earlier opportunities and constraints experienced by that individual. These:

...dispositions durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions generate dispositions objectively compatible with these conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to their demands. (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 54).

Bourdieu claims that individuals contain within themselves their past and present experiences and their position in the social structure 'at all times and in all places, in the forms of dispositions which are so many marks of social position' (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 82). However, at other times he refers to differences among individuals of the same cultural grouping: 'Just as no two individual histories are identical so no two individual habituses are identical' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 46). Thus, Bourdieu maintains that: 'Habitus, within, as well as between, social groups, differs to the extent that the details of individuals' social trajectories diverge from one another' (1993, p. 47). According to Reay (2004b), throughout his career Bourdieu continued to challenge any deterministic view of habitus. To understand how habitus works one has to consider the relationship between it and another of Bourdieu's key concepts known as 'field'.

Field

Bourdieu (2005) considered it necessary to examine the '*social space* in which interactions, transactions and events occurred' (p. 148) in order to better

understand how people interact in their world. Bourdieu referred to this social space as 'field'.

A field is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field... in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 40-41).

The social field does not stand alone and Bourdieu suggested a methodology that brought together the concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* as a means of understanding the social world. He suggested that the game played out in social fields is competitive with social agents trying to maintain or improve their position using various strategies or capitals at their disposal:

Thus agents are distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the structure of their capital (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 127).

Thomson (2008) maintains that the game of life play is played out on an uneven playing field because some players begin with particular forms of capital which advantage them from the beginning 'because the field depends on, as well as produces more of, that capital' (Thomson, 2008, p. 69). This way, those with the

right capital maintain and increase their advantage. This does not, however, mean that an individual is destined to remain disadvantaged because, although a field has dominant social agents and institutions within it that exert considerable power and influence over what happens, there is still room for agency and change. Bourdieu (1988) explains the possibility of 'free play' in fields. The influence of what is happening in other fields and outside influences such as new technologies, financial crises and so on, also affect what occurs in a field. However, as Bourdieu also claims:

All individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result their strategies (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 41).

Maton (2008) sees habitus and field as 'mutually constituting' (p. 57). He suggests that habitus and field are both evolving and do not always map neatly onto each other, that the structure of each has its own 'internal logic and history' (p.57) and this allows for a varying degree of match or mismatch. For example, and as explained in chapter one, individuals who anticipate feeling awkward in a certain social situation, like 'a fish out of water' (Bourdieu, 1984) may choose to avoid placing themselves in that situation:

Refusing, what they are refused ('that's not for the likes of us') adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defines them (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471).

Whereas when a person encounters a social situation in which they are comfortable, like a 'fish in water' their habitus matches the field. They 'are attuned to the *doxa*, the unwritten "rules of the game" underlying practices within that field' (Maton, 2008, p. 57). This relationship between habitus and field is central to Bourdieu's explanation of how habitus and field have a major role in social reproduction (Maton, 2008).

When habitus and social field do not match, the individual may experience conflict and dissonance. This can occur when a student from a working class background goes on to higher education and confronts an institution steeped in an unfamiliar habitus. The individual may then look for ways to change and possibly transform their lives. This dissonance can result in:

A habitus divided against itself, in constant negotiation with its self and its ambivalences, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of the self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 511).

This extract reflects Bourdieu's assertion that the concept of habitus is not deterministic and that the individual can indeed take action to change their habitus. This notion of change leads on to a discussion of the third of Bourdieu's major theoretical tools, that of *capital*. According to Thomson (2008, p. 81) Bourdieu constructed capital as 'an epistemological and methodological approach to a historicized and particular understanding of social life'.

Capital

Bourdieu identified three types of capital: *economic capital*, which comprises assets and money; *cultural capital* which covers forms of knowledge and cultural preferences; *social capital* which includes family, religious and cultural heritage' (Bourdieu, 1990b). He argued that an individual's position in social space (as explained earlier) is contingent on the volume of capital he or she possesses and the structure of that capital: 'that is, the relative weight of the different species of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their assets' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 127). According to Crossely, Bourdieu claimed that everyone in a particular society has an 'objective position in social space by virtue of their portfolio of economic and cultural capital' (2008, p. 88) and that everyone has a measure of capital which can take different forms.

The key to understanding Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and how it 'works' is to note the distinction he makes between economic capital and all forms of symbolic capital (social and cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 1997).

Bourdieu expands the category of capital to go beyond economic assets. He also maintains that 'the most material types of capital - those which are economic in the restricted sense - can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and visa versa' (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 46).

Bourdieu (1997) explains that when an economic exchange takes place involving economic capital this is seen as 'objectively and subjectively oriented towards the maximization of profit i.e. (economically) self-interested' (p. 46). The exchange deals only with 'goods which that are directly and immediately convertible into money' (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47) and therefore is quantifiable,

whereas other forms of capital i.e. cultural and social are seen as '*disinterested*' (p. 46). Bourdieu (1990b) explains that this '*disinterest*' is apparent in the artistic field where 'one can say, that the interest promoted by this field is an interest in disinterestedness' (p. 110). In the artistic field:

cultural capital is presented as reflecting the intrinsic value of art works in themselves ("essentialism") and the capacity of certain gifted individuals (those with "distinction") to recognize and appreciate those essential qualities (Moore, 2008, p. 104).

Those individuals who appreciate and recognize the unique qualities in works of the art, that is to say, art's intrinsic worth are said to possess symbolic capital which illustrates that they are 'people of taste' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 234) and distinction. Bourdieu (1997) argues that because symbolic capitals are 'arbitrary' in nature and based on particular competences that those individuals who possess these symbolic capitals possess the structure of social inequality prevalent in society continues to be reproduced.

As stated earlier, Bourdieu (1997) does however assert that symbolic capitals are in fact transubstantiated types of economic capital and he explains 'that economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital' (1997, p. 54).

However, the symbolic forms of capital are not always seen for what they are and Bourdieu (1997) maintains that:

because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic

capital , it is predisposed... to be unrecognized as capital
and recognized as legitimate competence, as authority
exerting an effect of (mis)recognition (p. 49).

Misrecognition is one of the ways in which social inequality continues to be reproduced. In his work Bourdieu demonstrates that the arbitrary and instrumental nature of symbolic capitals work as assets that bring either social and cultural advantage or disadvantage (Bourdieu, 1990b). For example according to Bourdieu (1997):

The education system reproduces... perfectly the
structure of the distribution of cultural capital among
classes (and sections of class) in that the culture which it
transmits is closer to the dominant culture...' (p. 493).

He explains that those classes with the highest levels of dominant cultural capital are over-represented in the elite higher education institutions (Bourdieu, 1997). This occurs because the dominant capitals become embodied as part of one's habitus and together with one's social field results in practice, as the equation below shows:

$$[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice} \text{ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 101).}$$

Maton (2008) explains that practice is an outcome of 'relations between dispositions (habitus) and position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field)' (p. 51). The equation illuminates the interconnectedness of habitus, culture and field. Reay et al. (2005) explain that 'it is through the workings of habitus that practice (agency) is linked with capital and field (structure)' (p. 22).

According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) cultural capital is transmitted within the family, it 'is subject to a hereditary transmission' (p. 49) and 'associated primarily with specialization and accomplishment ("cultivation")' (Moore, 2008, p. 113).

The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state i.e., in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, *Bildung*, presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation... this embodied capital,... converted in to an integral part of the person, into a habitus... (Bourdieu, 1997a, p.48).

Moore asserts that 'The formation of embodied cultural capital entails the prolonged exposure to a specialized social *habitus*' (2008, p. 111) and Bourdieu (1997) argues that the accumulation of cultural capital begins at birth. In his theoretical framework cultural capital is objectified as *habitus* and is realized and embodied in practice. As stated earlier, Bourdieu (1997, p. 493) argues that: 'The education system reproduces... perfectly the structure of cultural capital among classes' His assertion will be explored in the next section.

Forms of capital and higher education choices

In Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the middle classes know *how* the educational system works (Bourdieu, 1997); the cultural capital that they have is what Devine refers to as 'informational capital' (2004, p. 69).

Those sections which are richest in cultural capital are more inclined to invest in their children's education at the

same time as in cultural practices liable to maintain and increase their specific rarity (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 502).

In her investigative study Devine (2004) explored the role that middle class parents' play in their children's education. She interviewed 86 middle class parents in the UK and US and she argues that the parents she interviewed inculcated in their children sets of values and practices that promoted not only educational success but also occupational success. The corollary is that working class families have access to different forms of cultural, social and economic capital and therefore the educational decisions they make will be different.

Where people start out in life very much shapes their educational and occupational horizons, what they would like to do, how these hopes shape their thoughts and actions and the confidence with which they feel they can realise their dreams (Devine, 2004, p. 93).

In relation to choosing or selecting higher education institutions, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggest that middle class parents use their cultural capital to aid their children in acquiring qualifications from elite universities or the 'best' ones they can access. Indeed Brown (1995) asserts that education selection is more often based on the 'wealth and wishes of parents rather than the individual abilities and efforts of the pupils' (p. 44) and he goes on to suggest that 'the equation 'ability+effort=merit' has been reformulated into 'resources+preference=choice' (1995, p. 44). He does not see the increase in numbers attending university in the 1990's as an equalising of opportunity.

Rather, he sees an increasing differential between the various universities and what they offered their students.

According to Brown (1995) the top rung of universities are inhabited mainly by middle class students, and post-1992 universities are inhabited mainly by those from a working class background. In a more recent study the Sutton Trust (2011) found that 48.2% of independent school students in England were accepted into one of the 30 most highly selective universities whereas only 18% of students in non-selective state schools were accepted by these universities.

In fact:

When ranked by the number of Oxbridge entrants, four schools and one college sent more students to the ancient universities over the three years of this study than the bottom 2,000 schools and colleges put together (Sutton Trust, 2011, p. 18).

This means that, for the most part, working class students' attend less selective and lower status universities. Qualifications obtained from lower status universities have been considered to hold less exchange value in the labour market than the more selective universities that many middle class students attend (Brown, 2013).

Devine (2004) claims that middle class parents have the expectation that their children will succeed academically because they *know* that their children are academically able and they also *know* what their children need to do to succeed. There is the assumption of success. Devine (2004) argues that working class

parents on the other hand may also have aspirations for their children to be academically successful but they do not tend to have the same confidence in their children's intellectual ability. Their occupational expectations for their children also differ from middle class parents. According to Devine (2004) they are 'happy' to see their children in any occupation that is seen as an improvement on their own blue collar employment and status.

Those children from a working class background who have aspirations to further their academic careers can therefore be faced with 'difficult choices and limited resources' (Devine, 2004, p. 8). Some of these choices are economic in nature. Working class students may have to weigh up the opportunity costs of remaining outside of the labour force for an extended period of time. The concept of a delayed payoff may be beyond their own and their family's economic capability (Devine, 2004). In England, this opportunity cost has become even more relevant since September 2012 when university tuition fees rose to £9,000 per year.

Middle class children, on the other hand, know that it is in their best interests to attend university and they are encouraged and supported by their parents who have the relevant cultural as well as economic capital (Sutton Trust, 2013; Dorling, 2014) to ensure that their children not only go to university but go to what they perceive as a *good* university. Once at these universities, middle class students are able to consolidate and enhance their cultural and social capital (Clegg, 2011).

Officially the ability to participate in higher education is portrayed 'in meritocratic and individual terms, but in reality the actual costs and benefits of

participation are unevenly socially structured' (Clegg, 2011, p. 95). Middle class children, not faced with the same economic, cultural or social restrictions faced by working class children, attend universities that allow them to build up their cultural and social capital (Clegg, 2011). In their study of choice of university in the UK, Reay, et al., (2005) see 'choice' as being intrinsically linked with the cultural capital and the habitus of the student. Their research found that middle class students see moving to higher education as a natural, orderly and clear cut process whereas working class students experience educational choice as a risky and constrained process (Ball et al., 2000; Reay et al., 2005).

Obtaining entrance into university is a major transition which students from a working class background have to make in their quest for academic excellence and credentialization. But, even before this, achieving the necessary GCSEs which enable them to continue with their studies is a *major* hurdle for many working class students. Many of these students will be the first in their families to stay on at school beyond the compulsory leaving age of 17 and they need to navigate their way through the sixth form. Choosing subjects that enable them to attend university can be fraught for working class students with no prior knowledge of A levels or of university entrance requirements. These 'first timers' have to achieve the necessary grades to win a place at university. Having successfully made these transitions they then enter an environment that is a, 'milieux with which they are tend to be unfamiliar' (Crozier et al., 2008, p. 172), entering a field that does not match their habitus, where there are new rules of the game to adapt to (Bourdieu, 1990b). These students need to find ways of engaging with this new environment or at least coping with it (Crozier et al.,

2008), they need to show great resilience (Gofen, 2009). Many first generation higher education students choose a university in which they feel 'at home' (Crozier et al., 2008). For some, the lack of appropriate cultural capital means that choice of university can be a fraught experience for children who are 'first-generation higher education students' (Gofen, 2009, p. 104).

Differentiation of higher education institutions

Universities differ from each other along a range of dimensions such as the location and whether they have a campus or split site location; is student accommodation provided or do students live in accommodation near the university perhaps some students live at home; the curriculum offered to students; the flexibility and options offered, entry requirements and the populations they serve (Brennan & Osborne, 2008). Crozier et al., (2008) for example, identify a 'polarisation of types of university attracting working class and minority ethnic students' (p. 167) and suggest that students are exposed to different experiences within the different types of university. These differences in turn reflect a differentiation in wealth and organisation of the various types of university as well as their expectations of the students and the students' individual socio-cultural backgrounds (Crozier et al., 2008) (See also Sutton Trust, 2000; Power, et al, 2003). Reay (2004b) similarly asserts that there is now hierarchy of universities related to the social class of the students attending the university as opposed to a hierarchy which reflects the quality of teaching and resources available at the university, and suggests that universities have:

identifiable institutional habituses in which their organisational culture and ethos is linked to wider socio-economic and educational cultures through processes in which universities and the different student constituencies they recruit mutually shape and reshape each other (Reay et al., 2010, p. 111).

The assertion being that both the university and the student attending the university have an influence on how each sees itself in both academic and cultural terms.

Choice of university

Clegg (2011) suggests that while all UK universities currently produce a rhetoric of widening participation and extending opportunities they simultaneously 'systematically reproduce inequalities of experience and outcome' (p. 93). Other researchers concur with these findings (Ball, Davies, David & Reay, 2002; Crozier et al., 2010; Reay et al., 2005). As discussed previously, there is considerable research which shows that gaining access to university, especially an elite university, is more about the various forms of capital available to the individual than any 'rational individual decision-making by informed consumers in a market' (Clegg, 2011, p. 95). 'Choice' according to Reay et al., (2005) is dependent on family and other networks and connections which provide the individual with the necessary capital to make informed decisions about what educational opportunities are available. The advice given by the school or further education institution that these students attend can be important in the choosing process.

The impact of schools and further education colleges on university choice

The impact of different types of schools on their students' choices of post-compulsory schooling was explored by Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, (2008). They found that the majority of students who attended schools with a sixth form aspired to attend university. This was the case for both higher and lower socio-economic status (SES) schools, though with 85% of their students favouring university, the higher SES schools were slightly ahead of those schools with the lower SES catchment, which had 74% favouring university (Foskett et al., 2008).

Even in schools with sixth forms which served more diverse SES locations the emphasis on academic pathways emerged as a strong feature. The ethos of the school (with a sixth form) is founded in middle-class aspirations and so reinforces the narrow range of achievement horizons whatever the SES of the catchment (Foskett et al., 2008, p. 57-58).

This finding was in contrast to those schools without a sixth form, where the majority of students expressed a desire to pursue vocational courses. Schools in low SES areas reported that 79% of their students wanted to do vocational courses while schools in higher SES areas had 68% of their students expressing an interest in pursuing vocational courses. Foskett et al., (20058) concluded that schools and sixth form colleges 'control' and 'manage' students' choices and decisions in different ways.

Ball et al., (2002) also found that the higher education institution chosen by students was related to the school they attended. They saw 'school effect' as an independent variable and described it as 'institutional habitus'. Expectations of choice were constructed over time based on the views and advice of teachers and fellow students and the learning experience, with a clear relationship between the 'families habituses and the institutional habituses' (Ball et al., 2002, p. 58).

Embedded perceptions and expectations make certain choices 'obvious' and others unthinkable, according to where you stand in the overall landscape of choice' (Ball et al., 2002, p. 58).

Reay et al., (2005) also refer to the 'institutional habitus' (p. 35) of schools and further education colleges and describe this as 'an intervening variable, providing a semi-autonomous means by which class, raced and gendered processes are played out in the lives of students and their higher education choices' (p. 35). The habitus of each university is linked to the socio-economic cultures of their particular intake, and according to Reay (1998c), each shape and reshape the other. Students' higher education choices are influenced by family, friends, educational institution attended and their own perceptions and beliefs (Reay, et al., 2005). These influences overlap but 'there are specific effects from attending a particular educational institution' (Reay, et al., 2005, p. 38). A joint report by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Sutton Trust and (2009) found that the number of university applications from further education colleges to the 'Sutton 13' group of

universities (see Appendix B for a list these of universities) was less than half of those from other types of schools. This applied even after accounting for the differences in average overall levels of A level attainment of the schools and colleges. They found that students from further education colleges were less likely than students from schools with a sixth form to choose to study the most selective higher education courses even on achieving the pre-requisite A level results (BIS, 2009).

Reay, et al., (2005) suggest a number of possible reasons for these findings. These include differences in *careers advice* received, or in some cases the lack of careers advice received and the *curriculum offered* at the different educational institutions. For example, studying 'new' subjects such as media studies in the sixth form can limit university choice as 'elite' and 'red-brick' universities usually require traditional, or as Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) suggest *arbitrary* subjects, whereas post-1992 universities are open to accepting students who have studied the newer subjects. The *level of advice* about university choice in further education colleges is also often limited, and, the relationship between the specific knowledge the individual student has about higher education institutions and the *parameters the school sets* around which higher education institutions their students should apply to combine to limit the student's choices (Reay, et al., 2005). As stated earlier, these factors possibly explain why many students from further education colleges 'choose' to attend modern universities.

Student's own expectations

As previously argued, each university has its own 'institutional habitus' (Ball et

al., 2002, Reay et al., 2005) and students are acutely aware of this (Reay et al., 2010). Those applicants to higher education from a working class background are very concerned with 'fitting in' and 'feeling comfortable' with the university (Bourdieu, 1990a; Reay et al., 2005). This often results in them seeing the elite universities as 'not for the likes of us' because they feel that the institutional 'habitus' alienates or 'others' them (Crozier et al., 2008; Reay et al., 2005). The priority for many working class students is to go to a university where they feel comfortable and where they may 'feel at home within education' (Reay et al., 2005). Archer, Hutchings & Ross, (2003) also suggest that working class and other minority's feel 'alienated and Othered within the dominant academic culture' of university (p. 646) and while some working class students feel that they are able to access higher education, they may not feel any natural entitlement to it (Archer & Hutchings 2000; Archer et al., 2003).

In their study on the under representation of working class groups in higher education institutions, Archer et al., (2003) found that working class respondents understood their access to higher education to be restricted to 'lower status institutions, leaving entry to elite universities as closed to working class groups' (p. 129). This is borne out by the results of a study conducted by the Sutton Trust and BIS (2009) which analysed the destination universities of a cohort of students. Of the cohort three hundred thousand were working class students and just over 1% of them went to the 'Sutton13' universities (see Appendix B for a list of the 'Sutton 13' list of universities). Working class students tend to be attracted to post-1992 universities which have more open access and encourage diverse applicants (Sutton Trust, 2000; Hernandez-

Martinez, Black, Williams, Davis, Pampaka & Wake, 2008).

Reay, et al.'s (2005) study on the higher education choices of working class students found that their transition to higher education could be complex and difficult. They struggled with many issues that middle class students did not have to consider. Two thirds of the working class school students in their study were in some type of paid employment which resulted in them having less time available for study. The prospect of attaining the grades necessary to go to an elite university in these circumstances is often unrealistic. Working class students are also often confined in their choice of university by geography. Many of them are committed to living in a specific locality for reasons such as family or work commitments, and for economic reasons such as the cost of travel and accommodation.

Reay et al., (2010) found that those working class students who attended a post-1992 university tended to live at home and chose their local university. These decisions were often made for financial reasons. Their experience of higher education was 'one characterised by continuity rather than the change and transformation of working class habitus in the more elite universities' (p. 112), their identities as learners remained 'relatively fragile and unconfident' (p. 115), they did not identify as university students, rather they saw themselves 'as local, working class and 'at college'' (p. 115). These students, like those in Ball et al.'s (2000) study, saw the elite universities as not for them. According to Reay et al., (2010) this attitude is prevalent among working class students because they have 'low self-academic esteem' (p. 120), which they suggest,

comes from having fragile and unconfident learner identities; they have 'self-doubt and anxiety around learning' (p. 124).

Education is often seen as a struggle by working class learners, resulting in them having lower academic expectations and battered self-confidence (Heath, Fuller & Paton, 2008). Many working class students who attend post-1992 universities have had negative and undermining school learning experiences (Reay et al., 2005). This negative experience leads to a lack of confidence in their academic ability which is often compounded by the fact that they go to a post-1992 university because they failed to get in anywhere else, or they believed that they were not capable of getting in to any other university (Reay et al., 2005). Working class students find their individual habitus 'matches' the institutional habitus of the post-1992 university. Reay et al., (2010) found, that this experience can further reinforce a lack of academic confidence in the student and can be 'potentially counterproductive' (Reay et al., 2010, p. 120). Therefore, according to Reay (2001), the higher education choices of the working classes demonstrate ways in which the social, physical, and psychological marry to maintain them in working-class spaces.

Brennan & Osborne (2008) also found that working class students were more likely to attend their local university and to live at home. The only time these students spent at university was time spent in classes, as many worked part-time. 'Students living at home often continue with the same work patterns, family responsibilities, leisure activities and social networks that they employed while at school' (Hayton & Paczuska, 2002, p. 267). Working class students generally choose the modern universities as these universities are more flexible

with their requirements which allows the working class student to 'fit in' (Reay et al., 2010). But as figures show, even these universities have only been moderately successful at widening participation with just 17% of children on FSM attending any university (BIS, 2011).

Archer & Leathwood (2003) suggest that many working class students choose particular institutions, i.e. post-92 universities, where they 'can participate without damaging or changing valued working-class identities' (p. 178). The institutional habitus of the post-1992 university, while providing a sense of security for the working class student, does not provide them with a sense of belonging to the university (Archer & Leathwood, 2003, p. 177). According to Reay et al., (2010) working class students, who attend pre-92 universities, 'seemed to be much more integrated into the life of the university and to have a stronger sense of themselves as university students' (p. 112). These students were, however, also very aware of being in a predominantly middle-class institution (Reay et al., 2010, p.113), in other words 'like a fish out of water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127).

Working class students' experiences of higher education

There is limited research on students' experiences once at university and even less research on the experiences of working class students (Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2010). What we do know is that the withdrawal rate among working class students is much higher than those from middle class backgrounds (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2013b).

Withdrawal rates

In England there is a 'significant gap in the non-continuation rate between advantaged and disadvantaged students' (Vignoles & Powdthavee, 2009, p. 1) and women appear to be out-performing men in many aspects of higher education (Vignoles & Powdthavee, 2009). In the mid-2000's, in the UK, young women were 25% more likely to enter university than young men. This figure rises to 44% in disadvantaged areas (Equality Challenge Unit, 2013). Young women are also more likely to successfully complete their degree courses. Working class males are the least likely of any cohort to enter university and the most likely to withdraw especially if they are white and working class (Quinn, Stack, Casey, Thexton & Noble, 2006).

Withdrawal rates between universities vary enormously with elite and red brick universities having much lower withdrawal rates than the post-1992 universities as can be seen when reviewing the 2007-08 intake of fulltime first degree entrants as an example. In that year, the University of Cambridge had a withdrawal rate of 0.6% whereas the University of Bolton had a withdrawal rate of 18.1%. The overall withdrawal rate for the year was 7.1% (Paton, 2010). The figures for 2010 showed that the withdrawal rate for the University of Bolton had gone up to 21.4% and that 45% of their undergraduates would fail to complete their degree course (Paton, 2010).

Working class students are more likely to attend post-1992 universities (Sutton Trust, 2000) as these universities have had the most success at widening participation but, as shown by the example above, they also have the highest withdrawal rates (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2013b). The figures for

2009/10 show that more than one in five undergraduates is failing to complete the first year of their degree course at the lower performing universities. More than 15% of students withdrew from higher education at London Metropolitan University, University Campus Suffolk and the University of West London (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2010).

In their study of provincial white working class boys, who did initially go to, and then withdrew from, post-1992 universities, Quinn et al (2006) found that withdrawing 'was a rational decision' (p. 746). For all of these young men, money was an ever present problem and there were other reasons such as the timing not being right, the subject not meeting expectations or circumstances not being right. 'They had to learn to live with poverty and debt as a normalised part of everyday life' (Quinn et al, 2006, p. 744). Hutchings & Archer (2001) also found that poverty and debt were seen as inevitable side effects of going to university for the working class applicants in their study. As such, it acted as a major deterrent. Quinn et al., (2006) found that all but one of their participants expressed a desire to return to education at some time in the future but what Quinn et al., (2006) also found was 'that these ex-students really want a flexible system which facilitates lifelong learning' (p. 747). These working class white young people could not afford to study full time, they required other higher education options.

Non-participation in higher education

On asking working class, non-participants in higher education, why they had chosen not to go to university, Hutchings and Archer (2001) were struck by the respondents' concept of higher education. These young people saw higher

education as polarised into elite universities that required good A level results where middle class students went to obtain 'prestigious degrees and careers' on the one hand and on the other, 'unattractive buildings in which 'skint' working class students have to work hard under considerable pressure, combining study with a job and having very little time for social life' (p. 87). The latter type of university was the one that these respondents felt was open to them and they saw it as an inferior higher education option.

They did not see these elite middle class universities being open to them because they lacked the qualifications and financial resources needed to attend them. They did not, however, want second best (Hutchings & Archer, 2001) and they, like the participants in the Reay, et al. (1999) study, saw that 'the spaces which have opened up within higher education were, by definition, degraded places they sought to avoid' (Reay, et al., 1999, p. 88, in Hutchings & Archer 2001).

While many young working class people see the potential benefits of higher education, they also see it as 'demanding great investment and costs, and yielding uncertain returns' (Archer & Hutchings, 2000, p. 569). Working class students find themselves in riskier positions than their middle class counterparts and therefore have limited participation choices. Their higher education choices are not only limited by their educational achievements but also by their concerns regarding their financial position, family situation, loss of working class identity, disadvantage within the higher education system, chances of failure, and, their ability to find work on completion of their study (Archer & Hutchings, 2000). As Skeggs (1997b) states: 'To think that class does

not matter is only a prerogative of those unaffected by the deprivations and exclusions it produces' (p. 7).

White working class men's access to higher education

As discussed earlier, women are now more likely to attend university than men (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2009), and they currently make up 56.4% of the entire student population (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014). Among the working classes, the increase in participation is based almost entirely on women's participation (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2014) and it has emerged that white working class men are the least likely to enter higher education (ECU, 2014). This group, along with black African-Caribbean men, are the most disengaged from higher education (ECU, 2014).

It has been suggested that working class men may be more attracted to the world of work after the end of compulsory schooling as opposed to the world of further and higher education (Cleary, 2007; Connell, 1989). As discussed in Chapter One, some researchers argue that for young working class men, their masculinity (*habitus*) does not necessarily fit comfortably with the world of education, much less higher education (Willis, 1977; Connell, 1989; Cleary, 2007). Many working class men see education as 'feminine' and therefore, once again, 'not for the likes of me' (Archer & Yamashita, 2003). For example, Cleary (2007) in her study, which focused on issues of male and female participation rates in further education in the west of Scotland, found that the young white working class men in her study were motivated to find full time work and establish a family. Their aspirations were associated with working hard, having an income and enjoying themselves at the end of the week. They were not

motivated to attain more educational qualifications. Cleary also found that many working class boys had not enjoyed their schooling experience and this, too, seemed to affect their decisions about higher education. According to Cleary, 'men from working class backgrounds are still socialised into wanting 'hard work', getting their hands dirty' (2000, p. 9) and that in working class areas 'there are clear social expectations of men – to be the breadwinners, to take up jobs which are traditionally 'male'' (Cleary, 2007, p. 19). Whatever the reasons 'Boys from poorer backgrounds are less likely to progress (to higher education) than females from the same backgrounds' (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2013a).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the concept of massification of higher education and I have looked at the statistical evidence to show that young people from working class backgrounds are still under represented in higher education. I have discussed Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field and shown how they can provide a theoretical framework for understanding the process of higher education choices, experiences and perceptions within and between classes. I have explored how the different types of universities, their differing entrance criteria and habitus impacts students' choice of university. I have considered the expectations, transitions and experiences of higher education learning among those students from a working class background. Specifically I have explored white working class men's reduced access to higher education as well as the active decision by some not to participate in higher education.

This exploration leads me to the Methodology Chapter in which I consider the methodology, methods and the conceptual framework most appropriate for undertaking my research which aims to establish the factors that enabled a group of academically successful white working class young men to succeed academically against the odds.

Chapter Three

Methodology and Methods

There is no single reason why people do social research... but, at its core, it is done because there is an aspect of our understanding of what goes on in society that is to some extent unresolved (Bryman, 2012).

Introduction

In this chapter I explain how the theoretical perspectives reviewed in the first two chapters inform both the methodological choices I made and the methods of data analysis that I have employed in my study. I begin by detailing my research questions and how I chose the theoretical perspectives which frame my research. I explore the reasoning behind my choice of research methodology and the complexities I encountered in designing my study. I discuss my initial design framework, the problems I experienced as the project progressed and how my initial design unravelled and had to be reworked. Then I explain the redesign of the project, the recruitment issues I encountered and my data collection methods. My data analysis process and the writing up process are then detailed. Retention issues and the key ethical issues I considered and addressed are discussed. Finally I explore the reflexive approach I took throughout the project and my positionality within the research process.

Research questions and theoretical perspectives

My study set out to explore an under researched area in the field of education: the factors that contribute to the academic success of a group of young white

men from a working class background. In terms of operationalizing this research project, I started to consider the usefulness (or not) of delineating a set of research questions. In the literature there is some debate about whether to formulate questions early in the research process or allow the questions to unfold as the research proceeds. According to Robson (2011), setting research questions can be constraining if one is trying to develop a flexible research design. However, working on the basis that research questions are provisional and that they can act as a useful guide as the project progresses (Bryman, 2012), I formulated the following questions based on my research interests:

- How do academically successful white working class young men account for their achievements?
- How and in what ways do academically successful white working class young men interpret their university experiences?
- What reasons (if any) do academically successful white working class males give for the under-achievement of many of their peers? What do they think could make an educational difference?

These three questions came out of my major concern to explore how it was that some white working class males did well in education, what shaped their experiences and why did they think many of their peers under-achieved academically. However, before I could undertake this work, I needed a theoretical perspective in order to shape and guide my enquiry.

The persistent under-achievement of white working class males in England is well documented (Sutton Trust, 2014, Strand, 2014). In the literature that I have reviewed in the first chapter I highlighted a number of socio-cultural

factors that have been identified as contributing to this under-achievement and I grouped these together. These categories included family influences such as parental choice of school; working class attachment to locality; working class students' reduced aspirations and attitudes to school. I also identified issues related to in-school effects such as misrecognition. One more dominant theme that emerged in the literature was clustered round forms of masculinities that seemed to lead to dis-engagement with school for some young working class males (Smith, 2007)

From a critical review of the factors that I had isolated from the research literature on working class attainment and 'under-achievement', two complementary but distinct theoretical perspectives seemed to offer useful explanatory frameworks for my research. As Anfara and Mertz (2014, p. viii) have argued, theoretical frameworks provide 'a lens for seeing and making sense of what to do in the design and conduct of the study'. First, it seemed to me that in delineating factors to do with family circumstances, educational choice making and cultural patterns, the work of Bourdieu was immediately applicable. His work is best known for its focus on social class reproduction and he developed a conceptual toolkit to tease out the ways in which social reproduction actually takes place. He argued that habitus, that is, dispositions to choose and behave in certain ways that are laid down in early childhood become a system of 'durable, transposable dispositions' that shape the choices that people make and influence their ways of being (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 53). However, Bourdieu also argued that society is divided into different spheres or fields such as politics and education. As individuals move into different fields they are more or less able to invest in these in exchange for Bourdieu's third

main concept: capital. Bourdieu argues that different forms of capital are in play and can be used to access advantage in some cases. All this has been detailed in Chapter Two. Overall though, Bourdieu's work seemed to offer a lens through which I could explore the ways that academically successful white working class males had transcended inequality and disadvantage and displaced any straightforward forms of social reproduction.

A Bourdieusian framework seemed a useful lens through which to begin to explore the ways in which a small sample of white working class males were able to account for their academic success in relation to the influences and assets that were made available to them in their family habitus, the fields of their schools and pre-university experiences as well as in their engagement in their university setting. I was also interested in the different forms of capital that they saw as useful and supportive to them in their academic progression towards graduation.

The second complementary lenses that I decided to use in order to understand why some working class men seemed to have almost defied the odds in accessing a place at university, related to theories of dominant cultures of masculinity that were in circulation and my samples' views about any impact or influence of these cultural formations on themselves and their peers and siblings. In Chapter One where I reviewed some of the influential research that explored the reasons why many white working class males under-achieve academically, one body of work stood out as being significant in explaining this pattern. Based on a sequence of highly influential qualitative studies that draw on the voices of young white working class males (Reay, 2002, Smith, 2007) the

argument has been put forward that dominant cultures of masculinity which side-line academic achievement but foreground style, culture, music and particularly football, play a major part in simultaneously compensating for and contributing towards educational failure. As my literature review revealed, hegemonic masculinities as outlined above featured as an important factor in white working class young men's academic underperformance. Thus, it seemed a useful theoretical tool to conceptualize and frame the relationship between white working class young men and educational achievement. It seemed potentially valuable to explore the influence of these hegemonic masculinities in the lives of a sample of academically successful young white working class men

It could be argued that cultures of masculinity constitute a dimension of the habitus of all young people and that the ways in which these cultures influence (or not) young working class men might fit into a Bourdieusian framework, at least to some extent. However, I want to hold onto the notion of hegemonic masculinity in a distinct and separate manner in order to ensure that I give serious attention to an aspect of the social worlds of young white working class males. This is because the pressure of some forms of hegemonic masculinities has figured as a significant influence on the academic attainment of working class males (Sheriff, 2006, Jackson, 2010). Many questions are raised by taking the concept of hegemonic masculinity and applying it to academically successful working class males. Is it that somehow this group is more able to 'avoid' the pressures to be anti-school and pro-sports and street oriented, to put it simply? Or are there other forms of masculinity that are in competition with the dominant forms that successful academic working class males take up? For example, do some working class males manage to achieve well and take a pro-

school stance because they see being a 'geek' as an inevitable yet acceptable identity, or because this is an identity that is forced on them by others?

(Mendick & Francis, 2012). Is there a degree of reification in the literature on hegemonic masculinities that side-lines those who Ball et al. (2000) call the 'ordinary' boys? What alternative forms of masculinity have influenced the educational pathways of a cohort of successful white working class males?

Thus the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, field and capital, as well as the hegemonic masculinities, and less hegemonic forms of masculinities perhaps, made up a complementary set of perspectives that I could use to conceptualize and explore the relationship between white working class young men and their educational achievement. These two theoretical perspectives have informed my methodological choices and the methods of analysis I have used.

A qualitative methodology

Perhaps one of the most fundamental decisions I had to make was about what methodology would be most appropriate to use to elicit the data that would answer my research questions. This is a key decision because the approach to be taken, the set of principles that will guide the work, will also dictate the methods and tools to be deployed when working with any data that is collected. I chose to take a qualitative approach because its intention is 'to understand the subjective world of human experience' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 17). The qualitative researcher is therefore concerned with the *individual* and understanding how the individual understands and interprets their social world and with the *interpretation* and *empathic* understanding of human action (Bryman, 2012).

Thus it seemed to me that a qualitative approach was compatible with my aim of exploring the possible factors that contribute to the academic success of a group of young white men from a working class background, exploring how they had successfully manoeuvred their way through the school system and gain entrance to university. I decided to use the criteria of 'gaining entrance to university' as it is generally taken to be a marker of academic success (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011). I wanted to gain some understanding of the factors that had been significant in their academic pathway and as Newby (2010) suggests:

Understanding people does mean that you have to deal with people's feelings, values and emotions as well as their behaviours, their attachments to place and people, their fears, hopes and motivations as well as their perceptions of the world, the organisations with which they have contact and their relationships with them (p. 117).

I planned to start by exploring with the young men their family backgrounds, that is to say, their habitus and the field of their schools to establish whether these were influential in their academic success. I also intended to examine the various capitals available to the young men in relation to their academic success as well as the influence, if any, of forms of hegemonic masculinities on the young men's educational trajectory. By drawing on their immediate views, their voices and experiences I believed that I could better capture what influence peer groups and laddish behaviour may have had on their educational experiences and the educational experiences of other members of their cohort.

Designing a Research Project

Getting started – the original design

A research design is not just a work plan. A work plan details what has to be done to complete the project but the work plan will flow from the project's research design. The function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible (de Vaus, 2005: 9)

Most universities require that doctoral students supply details of their research design before they start their data collection. However, one of the complexities can be the slippage between initial plans and designs and outcomes in the field.

I start by foregrounding the slippages that occurred in my design work, not least because some of them have implications for the status of my data and my findings.

When I started my project I had one central question in mind, to explore how a sample of white working class males who were successful in academic terms accounted for their success. When planning the research design for my project I had explored the work of dominant English studies in the field of widening participation in higher education as well as working class student's access and experiences in higher education (Archer 2007; Read et al., 2003; Reay, 2012; Reay, Ball & David, 2001; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009). I also explored studies that compared the experiences of working class students in different types of universities (Crozier & Reay, 2011; Crozier et al., 2008). One aspect that I had not encountered in this comparative work was any exploration of any

differences because of the subjects/disciplines being studied by those undergraduates who had self-identified as working class.

Thus, my initial research design planned to take these sorts of variables into consideration. I planned to talk to undergraduates in contrasting universities and in different departments. Somewhat simplistically, as I now appreciate, I planned to access my participants from some modern universities as well as some Russell group providers. I also wanted to tease out any differences between different subject choices and experiences related to class; for example, between more traditionally bounded subjects and more contemporary areas of study. In this way I had hoped to take up the work of Reay, Crozier & Clayton (2009) and add some new work in terms of subject/discipline. However, even had I wanted to do this, I experienced serious difficulties in accessing participants who would neatly fit into these predetermined categories. While this initial design was not going to be fruitful, nevertheless as I had started with this plan in mind, it did mean that my eventual sample, from four different institutions, could perhaps be described as coming either from 'elite' institutions or 'modern' providers. I had not attempted to access participants from other types of universities, and this limitation is discussed in some of the later data chapters.

Again, in my initial research design, I had to consider recruiting from a setting to which I had access as well as ensuring that the sample was as good as I could make it (Robson, 2011). With these considerations in mind I initially set about recruiting 20 'academically successful white males from a working class background'. However, here again, there were potentially some difficulties;

what is meant by 'academically successful' and by 'working class' needed to be teased out more fully to ensure conceptual and methodological clarity.

In my research design, '*academically successful*' was taken to mean those who had successfully negotiated the school system and were now attending university. I recognize that 'academic success' is a fluid, complex and contested concept. Not only does academic success mean different things to different people, it can mean different things to one individual at different times in their life. Nevertheless, according to Brown, et al., (2011), someone who has successfully negotiated the school system and attends university is generally considered to be academically successful.

There are also conceptual tensions involved in clarifying what is meant by 'class'. 'Class is a complex amalgam of the material, cultural, the emotional and the social' (Maguire, 2005, p. 429), class means different things to different people and is often measured in economic terms. The Office of National Statistics has, since 2001, used the National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC) as their main tool for classifying the population according to occupation (see Appendix A). This type of classification is economically based and has been criticised as too narrow by those who argue for the need to transform class theory by incorporating a culturalist perspective (Compton, 2000; Devine & Savage, 2000). Thus, recent work claims that class analysis needs to place a greater emphasis on culture, lifestyle and taste (Devine & Savage, 2000; Reay, 1998b.) But this approach has its limitations. According to Bottero (2004, p. 985):

The uneasy relationship between older and newer aspects of 'class' within renewed class theory means the wider implications of inequality considered as individualized hierarchy (rather than as 'class') have not been fully explored.

The term 'working class' is similarly difficult to unpack as Demie & Lewis (2010a) discovered when they asked head teachers, governors and teachers to explain their understanding of what it meant to be 'working class'. The consensus reached was that it was difficult to explain. They did all, however, agree that it was generally understood as working in occupations that required minimum skills and less formal education than was required for middle class occupations. In their research Demie & Lewis (2010a) use the term 'working class':

to refer to pupils whose parents were skilled and in semi-routine occupations or others who depended on the welfare state for their income and all pupils who are eligible for free school meals (p.6).

From this brief discussion it is evident that the terms 'class' and 'working class' are contested terms. However, in my research design, I had planned to ask white working class male students to participate and by consenting to be part of my study it would be axiomatic that they 'self-identified' as working class (Savage, 2000). By responding to my email they identified themselves as 'of a working class background' (see Recruitment Email Appendix C).

Initially, my study was designed to incorporate three sets of in-depth semi-structured interviews with up to twenty young white men from a working class background who had accessed higher education. The participants were to be at the start of their second year of academic study at two types of universities: modern and elite. In the initial design I had planned to recruit ten students from a modern university with five of those students studying traditional subjects and five studying newer subjects such as media and communications. I had also planned to recruit 10 students from an elite university with five students studying mathematics or physics based subjects and five studying the humanities.

I decided to interview the young men at the beginning of their second year of undergraduate study for two main reasons; I wanted them to have experienced at least a full year of life as a university student as this would allow them time to come to terms with university life. Students also have to negotiate multiple other aspects of transition during their first year of university such as living away from home and managing their finances. The second reason for initially interviewing them at the beginning of their second year was my concern relating to retention of participants over the period of the study. More students withdraw from university in their first year of study than in subsequent years (HESA, 2015). If I could avoid known periods of withdrawal i.e. the first year of university, I would hopefully overcome, to some degree, the retention issue. This knowledge informed my choice to recruit young men who were beginning their second year of undergraduate study. I would then follow them through their second and third years of study.

My interview questions were planned to take account of the two complementary theoretical lenses that I have already outlined. The first interview would focus on family life, the family habitus and capitals available to the families; the school experiences, the effect of the school fields and hegemonic masculinities on the young men's academic performance. The second interview would be conducted at the end of the young men's second year of university and would explore their experiences of university life and how they adapted their habitus to the field (if they did) and institutional habitus of their university. The final interview would be conducted towards the end of their third year of study when most of the young men would have been preparing to enter the labour market. The interview was planned to focus on their career ambitions as well their perceptions of why they thought that many white working class males fail to engage with education. Here the possible effects of hegemonic masculinities on this lack of engagement were to be explored.

My interview questions, as explained earlier, were based on the two theoretical perspectives developed in the first two chapters, a Bourdieusian framework based on the concepts of habitus, field and capitals and the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinities, which informed my theoretical framework.

Gatekeepers – my research design starts to unravel

After obtaining ethical consent for my study (discussed later in this chapter), I set about recruiting participants for my study. As universities are 'closed' settings I was aware that I would need to access the recruits via gatekeepers. Gatekeepers were critical to my recruitment drive because they controlled the access and as Lee (1993, p. 123) suggests 'social access crucially depends on

establishing interpersonal trust' with the gatekeeper. In attempting to recruit my sample of undergraduates, I needed to start by recruiting some gatekeepers and I needed to be able to convince them that my research would be useful and would not be detrimental in any way to either the participants or the institution.

My approach to building my sample was pragmatic and opportunistic and in this vein I initially approached senior academics I knew at two different types of university, in line with my initial research design, to ask if they would circulate my recruitment email (see Appendix C) to their second year students asking for volunteers to participate in my study. One academic was from a modern university and one was from an elite university.

The academic from the modern university asked me to come in for an interview in which he asked me to provide details of the purpose and nature of the research and its potential impact on the participants and the institution. The second academic asked me to email her the details of my thesis topic, proposed methodology, my research ethics and the text of my initial communication for recruitment to prospective participants (See Appendix C).

It was suggested by my contact at the modern university that I come in and present my proposal to a group of second year students. This I did and a circular email was sent round as a follow up to the presentation. Only one young man responded and agreed to take part in my study. My contact from the elite university sent the circular email to all the second year undergraduates in several of the colleges at the university and I received six responses. Five of the young men who initially responded to the email eventually agreed to take part

in the study. I had just asked for working class participants, and had not detailed any information about their subjects/disciplines, as it was obvious at an early stage that my intention to recruit from contrasting disciplines was not going to work in practice. It was going to be harder to recruit participants than I had initially envisaged. My initial design which involved recruiting students from a modern university and an elite university had resulted in only six young men coming forward. Thus at this point, it was obvious that my research design was going to have to be revisited and reworked.

Redesigning the study

Snowballing

I needed to enlarge the sampling frame if I was to fulfil my original aim of recruiting twenty men. I decided to side-line my initial interest in disciplinary differences for my main problem was now one of recruitment of enough participants to constitute a sample robust enough for my study. I needed to come up with another method of recruitment as the group I was trying to access was proving to be a 'hard to reach' population (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 169).

Researchers who are recruiting a purposive/theoretical sample often use *snowballing* to access hard to reach populations. This involves the first set of participants being asked to identify other possible participants for the researcher. I asked each of the six young men I had initially recruited (one from a modern university and five from an elite university) if they could identify other potential participants. While each of them indicated that they would do so, this did not elicit any further leads. I then mentioned to a young woman I knew, who was in her second year of study at another elite university, that I was

having problems recruiting young men for my study. She offered to ask fellow students who matched my criteria if they would be willing to participate in the study. She did this using the social networking agency, Facebook. She pasted on her Facebook page, a request asking her male friends if any of them 'self-identified' as working class and if so would they be willing to partake in a PhD research project. She received two positive responses giving me a total of eight participants, seven from two elite universities and one from a modern university.

My supervisor had a contact at a modern university whom she suggested I contact. This I did and I met with this academic at his institution. I explained my study to him and he agreed to send around my recruitment email to the second year students in his subject department. Seven young men came forward and this meant I then had 15 participants, eight from what I was calling modern universities (post 1992 providers) and seven from what I termed elite universities (Russell Group).

As I had initially intended to recruit 20 participants I mentioned the problems I was having to a fellow PhD student and she suggested that I contact her aunt who was a senior academic at a modern university. The contact offered to send round my recruitment email to the second year students at her university. I received no replies. She then sent the email around on two further occasions but no responses were forthcoming. I asked the young student who had helped me recruit two students from her university if she could broaden her reach by asking anyone she knew who fitted my criteria and was currently in their second year of study at university. She once again used Facebook to ask for recruits but also received no replies.

I then received, from my supervisor, the name of another senior academic at a fourth modern university whom I contacted. He too responded positively to my request and sent the recruitment email to the second year students at his university. This, too, elicited no responses. I then emailed each of the fifteen young men who had agreed to participate in the research project to ask if they would ask other young men from a similar background as themselves to participate. Most of them agreed to do so but no further participants were forthcoming. At this stage, and after discussion with my supervisor, we agreed that 15 students would be sufficient for my needs. I had been actively trying to recruit participants for several months and moved forward with the 15 participants. I include this lengthy account of my difficulties in recruitment because what happened was that I started with a tightly prescribed plan (my initial research design) and very quickly I was being reduced to 'Hobson's Choice'. This problem left me with some other tensions.

Snowballing as a recruitment technique can be prone to biases because it is influenced by the researcher's contacts (or those of their supervisor in this case) and this can lead to the over-sampling of co-operative groups (Cohen et al., 2011). This difficulty occurred in my sample construction as in one of the modern universities my contact was in the Department of Sport, and the seven recruits from that university were all from that department.

Another problem relates to the two types of (four) universities I had recruited from. While this sampling of universities may be seen as somewhat polarised in terms of status differentials and while it may be argued that categories such as 'modern; and 'elite' have their limitations, nevertheless as Jerrim, Chmielewski

& Parker (2015) argue, the UK has a cluster of elite universities and these confer privilege and advantage on their graduates. That is less possible in settings of less prestige, however good their teaching and support for students may be in practice. However, my point here is that there may well be similar experiences that working class students encounter at any university (whichever 'type' they attend) that are more related to their backgrounds, their habitus as well as to the various forms of cultural capital they have accrued along the way. As Crozier et al., (2008, p. 167) argue, university experiences for students at different types of university are more complex and nuanced 'than simply a stark polarisation'.

The four universities used for recruitment - recruitment problems...

In my initial research design there were a number of in-built problems to do with sampling (the participants, their subjects and settings). However, as I worked to recruit and redesign my research, I held onto my central concern.

My aim was to recruit white working class young men who had successfully manoeuvred their way through the school system and achieved entrance to university. I was interested in the individual's experiences and the factors that had led to their success rather than the experiences of groups of young men at different types of university.

So while the two universities from which I initially recruited my first seven participants may operate differently and may be seen as somewhat polarised choices, the real questions still remained. Drawing on my Bourdieusian lens, are the experiences that young white working class men have at university more to do with their family habitus, the capitals available to these young men

and their previous field experiences, rather than anything to do with going to different types of university? My concern was with factors influencing their success now rather than any comparison between subjects and settings although there were some differences that will be discussed in the data chapters.

For these sorts of reasons, I did not think that any experiences unique to each type of university would negate all the wider findings of my study. My reason for suggesting this is that the participants had already successfully negotiated their way through the school system – they were already academically successful white working class males - and establishing the factors which enabled them to experience this success was my dominant research question. Nevertheless I can see that having made the choice to accept recruits who came from modern and elite universities could be seen as a polarised choice. This may make a material differences to the data I collect in relation to the participant's university experiences and the conclusions I draw in that respect.

Questions about the respondents and sample size

When I decided to terminate my recruitment drive I had only been able to recruit 15 white working class males in their second year of undergraduate study across four universities in England though I had tried to recruit from two others as well. I considered the possibility that perhaps there were not many white men from working class backgrounds in the six higher education institutions I had approached. HESA (2008/09) figures show that the four modern universities my participants were attending took 335 students between them from low participation postcode areas. These figures did not reveal how

many of the 335 students were young or white or male. I also found that for the academic year 2006-7, only 45 young people on free school meals were successful in gaining admission to Oxbridge out of almost 6000 successful applicants (Jones, 2011). I do not know how many of these 45 successful entrants were young or white or male men, but the number of free school meal (FSM) children entering any university each year is indeed very small.

However, not all the participants in my study were on FSM and I discovered that the four modern universities in my recruitment drive had in the academic year 2008/09 admitted 2,595 identified as working class students, 38% of their intake (HESA, 2014). In the same year, the elite universities had recruited a total of 590 students from working class backgrounds 12% of their intake for that academic year (HESA, 2014). With these figures in mind one would not perhaps expect to receive a large number of responses to an email that asks for 'white males from a working class background in the second year of undergraduate studies' to participate in a series of interviews.

I also considered the possibility that some academically successful white young men from working class backgrounds may no longer consider themselves to be working class. Could it be, as Jones (2012) suggests, that the working classes have been so badly 'demonised' that people are no longer comfortable being categorized as 'working class'? Jones asserts that since the 1980's there has been:

an offensive against working class communities... No longer was being working class something to be proud of: it was something to escape from (p. 40).

Jones claims that what he sees as the 'vilification of all things working class seems to have had a real impact on people's attitude' (p. 142). Perhaps this 'vilification' explains the reluctance of some academically successful white young men from a working class background to identify as such.

There was another possibility that I considered,. Could it be that some academically successful young white working class men had experiences that caused them to deny their working class roots or at the very least, not want to discuss their backgrounds?

If, in a class-based society, working class means *lack*... if it means *wrong*... if it signifies poverty and dependence: how can it be admitted, let alone celebrated (Walsh, 1997, p. 155).

Whatever the reasons, this group - academically successful young white working class men in their second year of university study - proved 'hard to reach' and so, as explained earlier, I decided to move forward with my 15 recruits.

Those attending the elite universities were studying a range of subjects in line with my original design as can be seen in Table 4:1, but of the young men attending the modern universities, only one was studying a traditional subject, with the others having being recruited from one department at one university all studying Sports Science. Thus, I did not have the mix of subjects I had originally planned for. While I appreciated that my initial research design was unachievable (in terms of sample construction) nevertheless I had hoped that there would be some contrasts in relation to my second major theoretical lens,

hegemonic masculinities. For example, could it be that (some of) the young men studying Sports Science regarded their sporting prowess as cultural capital to be converted into academic capital? This seemed to be a fruitful question to explore with these particular young men.

My initial design was not now fit for purpose. However, I still wanted to focus on the factors that enabled these young men to gain admission to university as well as their experiences at university. While I realised that the subjects they were studying could be a factor in their accessing higher education, I did not want this topic to detract from the main focus of my work.

Table 3:1 Brief biographical descriptions of participants

Pseudonym Of Participant	Brief Biographical Details
Adam	Parents separated. Mother is a teaching assistant and father is a caterer. Has two older brothers. Attended the local primary school and local comprehensive. Currently at an elite university reading Engineering.
Ben	Parents divorced when he was 3 years old. Father is a copy writer and mother is a secretary. He has one younger sister. Attended the local primary school and an all-boys state grammar school. Studied the International Baccalaureate and was head boy. Now attends an elite university reading Law.
Craig	Parents separated. Father is a plumber and mother is an office worker. Has one younger brother. Attended the local primary and local secondary school where he was head boy. Then went to an independent grammar school where he studied the International Baccalaureate and was head boy. Currently at an elite university reading History.
Graham	Parents separated when he was 2 years old. His mother is a dinner lady, father's occupation unknown. Has an older and younger sister. Attended the local primary school and then attended a comprehensive school out of the catchment area. Moved to a sixth form college renowned for its maths and science teaching. Now at an elite university reading Physics.

Ian	Parents still together. Both parents are in the hotel service industry. Has an older brother and younger sister. He attended the local primary school and the local comprehensive. Now attends an elite university reading Mathematics and Computer Science
John	Parents still together. Father has worked in a bank since the age of 15, mother works in a radiography department. Has an older and a younger sister. Attended a Roman Catholic primary school and a Roman Catholic comprehensive. He then attended a local sixth form college and is currently studying at an elite university, reading Philosophy, Politics and Economics.
Leon	Leon is an only child brought up by his mother, a teaching assistant. Has Asperser's Syndrome. Attended the local primary school and the local comprehensive school then a sixth form college chosen because it was considered academic. He is currently attending an elite university, reading English.
Karl	Parents are separated. Mother is a child minder and father's occupation is unknown. Has two younger sisters. Attended the local primary school and chose the secondary school because he liked it. Currently attends a modern university studying Education.
David	Parents are separated. Mother is a nurse and father is a planning officer with the local council. Has one older brother. Attended three different primary schools. Attended the local comprehensive and then a sixth form college. Currently attends a modern university and is studying Sports Science.
Edward	Parents still together. Both parents are council housing officers. Has an older sister and a younger brother. Attended the local primary school. Attended a Roman Catholic comprehensive and a local sixth form college. Attending a modern university studying Sports Science.
Harvey	Parents still together. Mother is a nurse and father is a builder. Has one older sister. Attended the local primary school and the local comprehensive. Attended further education (FE) college renowned for offering sport. Currently attending a modern university studying Sports Science.
Nathan	Parents still together. Mother is a secretary and father is a bricklayer. Has a younger brother. Attended Church of England primary and secondary schools some distance from

	home. Currently attending a modern university studying Sports Science.
Oliver	Parents still together. Mother is a teaching assistant and father is a builder. Has one younger brother. Attended the local primary school and chose the comprehensive with a better reputation. Currently attending a modern university studying Sports Science.
Frank	Parents divorced when Frank was a baby. Father is a taxi driver and mother is a supermarket supervisor. Has an elder sister and an elder brother. Attended the local Church of England primary school followed by the local comprehensive. Currently attending a modern university studying Sports Science.
Mark	Parents still together. Mother is an advisor in a job centre and father is a plumber. Mark is an only child. Attended both the local primary and secondary school. Currently attending a modern university studying Sports Science.

Method of data collection

The most appropriate method of data collection, compatible with my conceptual framework based on Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, field and capitals and hegemonic masculinities, was the interview. The interview is a flexible and powerful tool and it allows the interviewer 'to understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people' (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 102).

As the purpose of my study was to 'acquire unique, non-standardised, personalized information' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 412) from the participants, I did not want to use a 'tightly structured and standardized' interview schedule but equally I did not want an interview that was completely 'unstructured and open-ended' (Punch, 2009, p. 145). I therefore chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as this approach would enable me to draw on the two theoretical perspectives I was using (See Appendices D, E & F) while allowing for fluidity

and open responses. So whilst I had a list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered based around the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, field and capitals and the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinities, I also wanted to allow the interviewee to elaborate on any individual points of interest (Denscombe, 2003). I was interested in learning about the participants' accounts of their academic success. I wanted to allow them the time and space to expand on issues that had been raised and perhaps bring up factors that I had not anticipated. I wanted to give the interviewees the opportunity:

to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express situations from their own point of view. In these senses the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable (Cohen et al., 2000, p.267).

Interviews generally are adaptable, and this suited my objectives as I could follow up and probe responses in order to seek clarification and elicit more in-depth answers where necessary.

Limitations and criticisms of the interview as a research tool

However, there are limitations to interviews. Interviews involve personal interaction and co-operation and the participants may not always wish to disclose the information that the researcher wishes to uncover (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Maguire 2008). Another issue with using interviews to collect data is that they can be time consuming. This was particularly relevant in my case as I was a sole researcher and I planned to interview each participant three

times over a 20 month period with each interview possibly lasting well over an hour. Transcribing interviews is also a lengthy process. Kvale (1996) suggests that a one hour interview can take an experienced transcriber seven hours to type up.

There are some who argue that interviewing as a research method, like other forms of qualitative research methodology, has gone too far in abandoning the scientific methods of verification and in refusing to make generalizations about behaviour (Bryman, 2012). It has also been suggested that some researchers 'have become obsessed with the idea of interviews as a means of discovering and revealing secret personal realities behind public facades' (Hammersley, 2003, p. 120). Those critical of the interview as a research tool are also sceptical 'about the capacity of interviews to provide accurate representations either of the self or of the world' (Hammersley, 2003, p. 120). As a researcher conducting interviews one also needs to be aware that the recollections and memories of individuals are, as Maguire (2008) points out:

tricky and unpredictable and they are overladen with emotions, desires and adjustments. Sometimes there are memories that people want to put to one side in a retelling of aspects of their lives (p. 48).

Interviews can however be useful in obtaining information about what people think, have experienced and which they may not have made public, as Skeggs (1997a) found in her research on work with working class women. The shame they felt being labelled 'working class' and the efforts they went to dis-identify with the working class label were elicited only when they were being interviewed with sensitivity and awareness by a researcher who shared a

similar background. Acknowledging the criticisms, shortcomings and benefits of using interviews as my method of data collection I re-examined my decision. I wanted to explore, through a Bourdieusian lens and the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinities, the factors that enabled my participants to experience academic success. I decided to use the data collecting tool, the interview, to explore this phenomenon from the young men's perspectives. I was able to spend many hours with each participant over a period of time, in the form of regular email contact, occasional phone calls and three recorded interviews lasting an average of 75 minutes each over the two years the research was conducted. This contact time gave both parties the opportunity to become more familiar and relaxed with each other.

Formulating my interview schedules

I decided to formulate open-ended questions explained by Kerlinger (1986, p. 442) as:

those that supply a frame of reference for respondents' answers, but put a minimum of restraint on the answers and their expression.

Open-ended questions have a number of advantages. According to Cohen et al., (2000), they are flexible and they allow the interviewer to probe and to ask the interviewee to elaborate and go into more depth if it is felt necessary. Open-ended questions can also be used to clarify any misunderstandings and they can help to develop a rapport between the researcher and the interviewee. The open-ended question can elicit answers that the researcher was not expecting and in

this way they can also open up areas that the researcher may not have considered in relationship to the study and its theoretical perspectives.

When formulating my schedules I designed questions that were distinct from each other with each question covering a different facet of my research agenda.

As Gillham (2000, p. 21.) says:

This is motivating for the interviewee, who will feel there is something fresh to say; but more importantly, questions that are distinct will throw up material which is distinctive in its content.

My aim was to have the structure of the interview come as close as possible to an everyday conversation but I had in mind a specific purpose and structure. For this reason I generally kept the questions short and simple only asking for clarification if there was some ambiguity. Kvale (1996) suggests that this 'meaning clarification' also signals to the participant that you as the interviewer are actually listening to them (p. 132).

I hoped that the interview would be a positive experience for the participants in my study. My intention was for the interview to be 'a conversation in which two people talk about a theme of mutual interest' (Kvale, 1996, p. 36) and as such be an enriching experience for the participant. In fact, several of the participants thanked me for giving them a platform to explore their academic experiences and the factors that enabled them to successfully manoeuvre their way through the school system and on to university.

The interviews took place in a location chosen by each participant with most

taking place on the various university campuses and two taking place in coffee shops local to the particular university. I wanted to conduct each interview in a place in which the interviewee felt at ease, with which he was familiar. My aim was to work in a setting 'where behaviour occurs naturally'. (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003, p. 95).

The Data Analysis Process

My data analysis, guided by my knowledge of the related research and by my theoretical framework, was an 'inductive' thematic content analysis involving iterative processes. These processes included developing a familiarisation with the data, the identification of descriptive codes/themes and the building of connections between these themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

As I have already detailed, the data collection period extended over almost two years as I interviewed each participant three times. This extended approach enabled me to take an iterative approach towards the data analysis. For example, in the second and third interviews each participant was asked similar questions but each young man was also asked questions related to what they had said in their previous interviews. In these follow up interviews I was able to probe themes I wished to return to and develop as well as introduce any new matters. Thus, the second and third interview schedules were designed in the light of any emerging conceptual or theoretical understandings (See Appendices D, E and F, for copies of the Interview Schedules).

The data analysis began with open coding. Coding is the process whereby data is broken down into component parts (Bryman, 2012). As Bohm (2004, p. 270)

explains 'coding may be described as the deciphering or interpretation of data'. In the initial stages, data are broken down and codes are assigned on every few lines of the interview transcripts. At this stage I was looking for reasons to explain my participant's success, the factors involved, key people who may have been influential etc. This was the first stage in making sense of the data (Charmaz, 2006).

This initial/open coding process entailed writing marginal notes and gradually clustering them into themes where portions of transcript were seen as belonging to certain names or labels (Bryman, 2008). For example, the first interview I conducted with Craig was open coded by my supervisor and myself separately and subsequently discussed in detail during a supervision. This provided me with the opportunity to check my coding processes and discuss with my supervisor some of my initial findings from the data (I have included this interview with open coding as Appendix K). What was evident was that some findings were appearing in all the interviews; for example, the influence of their parents as well as some key individuals (teachers and other mentors). I started to collect together all the open codes that I had identified in my first set of interviews.

Simultaneously, I recorded biographical details about each participant (see Appendix G for an example). The headings used in the table were in line with my research questions, which were informed by my theoretical framework, (see Appendix D for a copy of Interview Schedule One). This initial analysis was part of the process of familiarizing myself with my large data set (42 extended interviews) as well as the process of identifying descriptive codes.

After my open coding of each individual transcript after the first set of interviews, I then re-engaged with my data set, re-exploring and re-evaluating it in terms of the original codes (Bryman, 2013). Then I collected up all the significant codes that had occurred across the interviews (See Appendix M for extracts of three different transcripts showing the influence of 'Mother' as a code). With each of the dominant, recurring codes that were evident from my open coding, I produced a coding map (see Appendix N for the theme of 'Mother'). From these diagrams, I was able to start to construct axial codes (See Appendix P). Axial coding is the process of relating codes (categories and concepts) to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Axial coding is a more directed approach at looking at the data to help ensure that all the important aspects have been identified, it consists of identifying relationships and connections among the open codes. For example, in my work it was evident that Mother was a useful axial code bringing together the various categories and concepts relating to the family habitus in understanding my participant's academic success.

Most researchers argue that analysis is a complex process that draws on what the researcher has read, has experienced and that all these phenomenon influence was is seen as significant in analysing and coding the data. My project has been framed by two main theoretical perspectives, as I have explained at the start of this chapter, and thus, in coding and analysing my data, I was aware of the way in which these perspectives shaped my working on/with my data. However, it seemed to me that my critical lenses worked as explanatory devices and organisational ways in which to think about my interview data.

For example, the themes that emerged from my coding and analysis of the initial interviews were: family, schooling, mentors, fractions of class and misrecognition. Some of these codes were descriptive in style, others were more conceptual. The themes which emerged from the second interviews clustered round the commonalities and differences experienced at university by the young men. Here the themes tended to be more descriptive. The themes which emerged from my analysis of the final interviews dealt with the sense of disengagement with education experienced by many young white working class men more broadly as well as the role of dominant forms of masculinities that my participants identified as playing a part in the exclusion of their peers. The themes here centred round: family, schools and teachers, mentors, lack of aspiration and fear of failure.

My analysis allowed me to identify the key codes running through each of the interviews. I became familiar with the data I had generated, I identified descriptive codes/themes between which I built connections; throughout the data collection process I constantly checked the coding with the data, re-engaging with my data, re-exploring and re-evaluating it in terms of the theoretical perspectives that informed my conceptual framework and the original codes selected. I built connections between the key codes/themes I identified after each round of interviews and these formed the basis of my four data driven chapters.

Writing up

The writing up process became an integral part of my research. It became very much what Punch described as 'writing to learn' (2009, p. 341) in that I was

trying to construct a theoretical map/picture of the data as the analysis proceeded and writing helped me to develop this emerging map/picture. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that the 'analytical work of writing' is part of thinking, analysing and interpreting. This has been my experience. As an example, I began writing the first data driven chapter soon after I had completed the transcription of the 15 initial interviews and the initial coding processes. This initial piece of written work was re-worked over the life time of the research as more and more data became available. Through continued analysis of the original data, the addition of data from the subsequent interviews and with consistent referencing of the two theoretical perspectives, my writing was constructed, reviewed, reworked and then reconstructed. The final version of my dissertation now bears very little resemblance to the original writings

I was always very conscious that the researcher needs to present a written report that is an honest representation of the participants' stories. I was very aware that I came to the study with pre-conceived ideas of what I might find. However, I found that the data analysis process I followed was comprehensive and this process helped me to try to ensure that any pre-conceived notions I might have held did not become part of the research or the findings.

Retention of participants

I was concerned about possible morbidity rates in my sample between interviews and this was one of the reasons I had decided to recruit second year university students. This still left me with the possibility of losing students over the period the research was to be conducted. To try and mitigate against any potential loss I stayed in regular contact by email and text with the participants

over the two years. As LeCompte & Preissle suggest 'Over a sustained period of time, they (researchers) must maintain constant interaction with participants' (2003, p. 95). I was aware that the young men who had agreed to be interviewed initially might become reluctant to being interviewed again even though they had all appeared receptive to the idea when asked after their initial interview.

In the event, I lost two recruits who both withdrew from university (see Chapters Seven and Eight) but I was able to retain thirteen participants over the two year period. In total I had undertaken 42 interviews and I had a wealth of information to work with and a large data set. I did not therefore think the loss of two participants would impact my findings unduly.

Ethics and educational research

All social researchers are required to conform to a code of ethics (Creswell, 2008). Many codes of ethics have been set out by various organisations whose members use social research methods. I chose to use the 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' as set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011). As I was conducting research under the auspices of King's College London I was also conscious of needing to adhere to its code of practice. I obtained ethical approval for my research from the Education and Management Research Ethics Panel within the University (see Appendix H for a copy of the ethical approval email).

Within the various codes of ethics there are standard principles that a researcher is required to consider, these include the rights of the participants, respect for the participant and a commitment to promote respect for social science (BERA, 2011). The researcher must also endeavour to do no harm

(Kvale, 1996). In my study I explained to all the participants that they had certain rights. These included the right to know the aims and purpose of the study and how the results would be used. They also had the right to know if the study was likely to have any social consequences on their lives. They were made aware that they had a right not to participate and they also had the right to withdraw their interview data up to July 2014 should they choose to no longer participate.

The participants were assured that any information they disclosed would be confidential and pseudonyms would be used. As I was audio recording each of the interviews I explained to the participants that the information collected would be held in a secure place and once the research had been written up it would be destroyed. I did most of the transcriptions myself but I made the participants aware that should their interview be transcribed by someone other than me, their identity would not be available to the outside transcriber. I was aware of the ethics of maintaining their anonymity and confidentiality; anonymity meaning the inability to tell which responses came from which respondent and confidentiality meaning the respondent is not identifiable (Bell, 2012).

The participants reported that they took part in the research for a number of reasons. Many of them wished to tell their story in the hope that it might help other young men from a similar background to themselves achieve academic success. Leon explained that:

I think it is a valid thing to do. I was doing a lot of access work at the time and I just thought it sounded an

interesting thing at the time that like I actually have a perspective on and politically it is interesting too. I just think anything that anything that can make it better... because it is an issue.

An information sheet (Appendix I) was given to each participant before every interview and it was made clear what was required of them and what their rights were, as explained earlier. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before each interview and they were also asked to sign a consent form (Appendix J) before each interview. The participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns both before and after each interview.

I was committed to ensuring that my research was conducted with integrity and transparency and it was of the highest quality that I could achieve. I understood that in relation to the questions I posed about family habitus and cultural capital I had to be particularly sensitive and listen empathetically to the emotional message of how things were being said. As the interviewer it was my responsibility to *feel* when a topic was 'too emotional to pursue in the interview' (Kvale, 1996, p. 149). This did on occasion occur during the interview process and I ceased the particular line of questioning about the young man's family that was giving rise to the discomfort. The principles that I adhered to were those that Kvale (1996) suggests a researcher should live up to: honesty, justice and respect for the person.

Reflexivity

Being aware of the potential for bias during the collection and analysis of data as well as during the writing up process was a major consideration for me.

Qualitative data, by its very nature, is a product of co-construction and interpretation. As Creswell (2008) says of reflexive researchers: 'As individuals who have a history and a cultural background themselves, they realize that their interpretation is only one possibility' (p. 485). While I had to be aware of my own perspectives and positionality during the interview I also had to allow the focus to be on the perspectives of the person I was interviewing. The concept of reflexivity 'where researchers turn a critical gaze towards themselves' (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. 3) has been developed as an aid to considering and reducing bias for those using qualitative research. Reflexivity in research terms has been translated as:

Thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researcher and researched. Reflexivity requires critical self-reflection of the ways in which researchers' social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impact on the research process. It demands acknowledgement of how researchers (co)construct their research findings (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. ix).

I understood that as the researcher I was the 'central figure who actively constructs the collection, selection and interpretation of data' (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. 5). However, reflexivity means that the researcher should seek 'to understand their part in, or influence on the research' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 225). This I tried to do by monitoring my own reactions with the participants as well as my biases and place in the research (Cohen et al., 2011). This is an issue to which I return in the final chapter.

Positioning myself within the research

It is crucial as a social researcher to 'recognize who you are and how this may affect your view of the subject and your understanding of the material obtained' (Brett Davies, 2007, p.151). Taking this perspective involves being aware of how your personal identity may affect the interviewee. I was acutely aware that my personal identity, that is to say, being a white mid-aged, middle-class Australian born mother could potentially affect what the participants would reveal of themselves. I realised that by just 'being' I could influence the answers I received. As Denscombe, (2003) points out, there are limits to how much the social researcher can disguise themselves during interviews. What we can do and which to the best of my knowledge I did do is:

be polite and punctual, receptive and neutral, in order to encourage the right climate for an interviewee to feel comfortable and provide honest answers. What we cannot change is personal attributes (Denscombe, 2003, p.170).

I understood that as the researcher I controlled the interview process and that it was:

not the reciprocal interaction of two equal partners. There is a definite asymmetry of power: The interviewer defines the situation, introduces the topics of the conversation, and through further questions steers the course of the interview (Kvale, 1996, p. 126).

I tried to ameliorate any power imbalance between the participants and myself

by ensuring that they were at ease before the interviews and that the relationship between us was relaxed. During the interviews I allowed the participants to speak openly, freely and with no interruptions (Kvale, 1996). I was also conscious of trying to be a careful listener, of being sensitive to any attitude changes in the participants when certain lines of questioning were being pursued. For example, one participant became very short when discussing certain family matters so I did not pursue that line of questioning.

I concur with Denzin (1997) when he says that it is important for researchers to position themselves within their research and as a researcher I was aware that I brought my history, culture and personality with me into my research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I was also aware that I have values and biases and that my research could not be value free; however my position was to be self-reflexive to try to 'ensure that there is no untrammelled incursions of values in the research process' (Bryman, 2012, p. 29). I was aware that my involvement with the participants was:

governed by an informal tradition that expects a special kind of commitment from the researcher. This involves sympathising and identifying with the people studied to the extent that the materials produced represent the participants' life in ways that are not just true to life and authentic to outsiders but that are legitimate to the participants themselves (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003, p. 96).

Summary

In this chapter I have explained the theoretical positioning that frames my research. My interest lies with the factors that influence the academic attainment of those white working class men who are academically successful as signalled by their accessing a place in an institution of higher education. From my review of the literature that investigates why this cohort are largely unsuccessful, the reasons given for this outcome relate to factors intimately connected to family, schooling and perhaps aspiration that go towards reproducing the social world. I have also suggested, on the basis of research literature in the area, that some of the dominant cultures of masculinity can work to displace academic attainment and foreground style, culture, sports and not being female i.e. 'not doing education'.

It seemed to me that together, these two sets of complementary theoretical assumptions could help me explain and understand the phenomenon of white working class under-achievement more fully by exploring how it is that some young men do extremely well indeed. In this way, I hoped to be better able to break into and explore in more detail those factors that had enabled a sample of young working class white men to experience academic success.

The two theoretical perspectives that run through this study have informed my choice of methodology and data analysis. I chose a qualitative approach because it is characterised by its central concern for how the individual interprets their social world. In consequence, the method of data collection I chose was the semi-structured interview. My data analysis and writing up processes were also informed by Bourdieu's concepts and the work on

dominant masculinities as well as by my initial readings of relevant literature and the sense I made of what my participants had to say. The final section of this chapter centres on my concerns with the retention of participants, ethical considerations, my engagement in the process of reflexivity throughout the project and my position within the research. In the next chapter I explore the data collected during the first round of interviews.

Chapter Four

Early Life and Schooling

These fathers and mothers (middle class parents) were...able to hand on an increasing skill in commanding the state system such that their sons and daughters ultimately received a high standard of education, and one which helped them move smoothly into satisfied and energetic citizens (Jackson & Marsden, 1966, p. 57).

Introduction

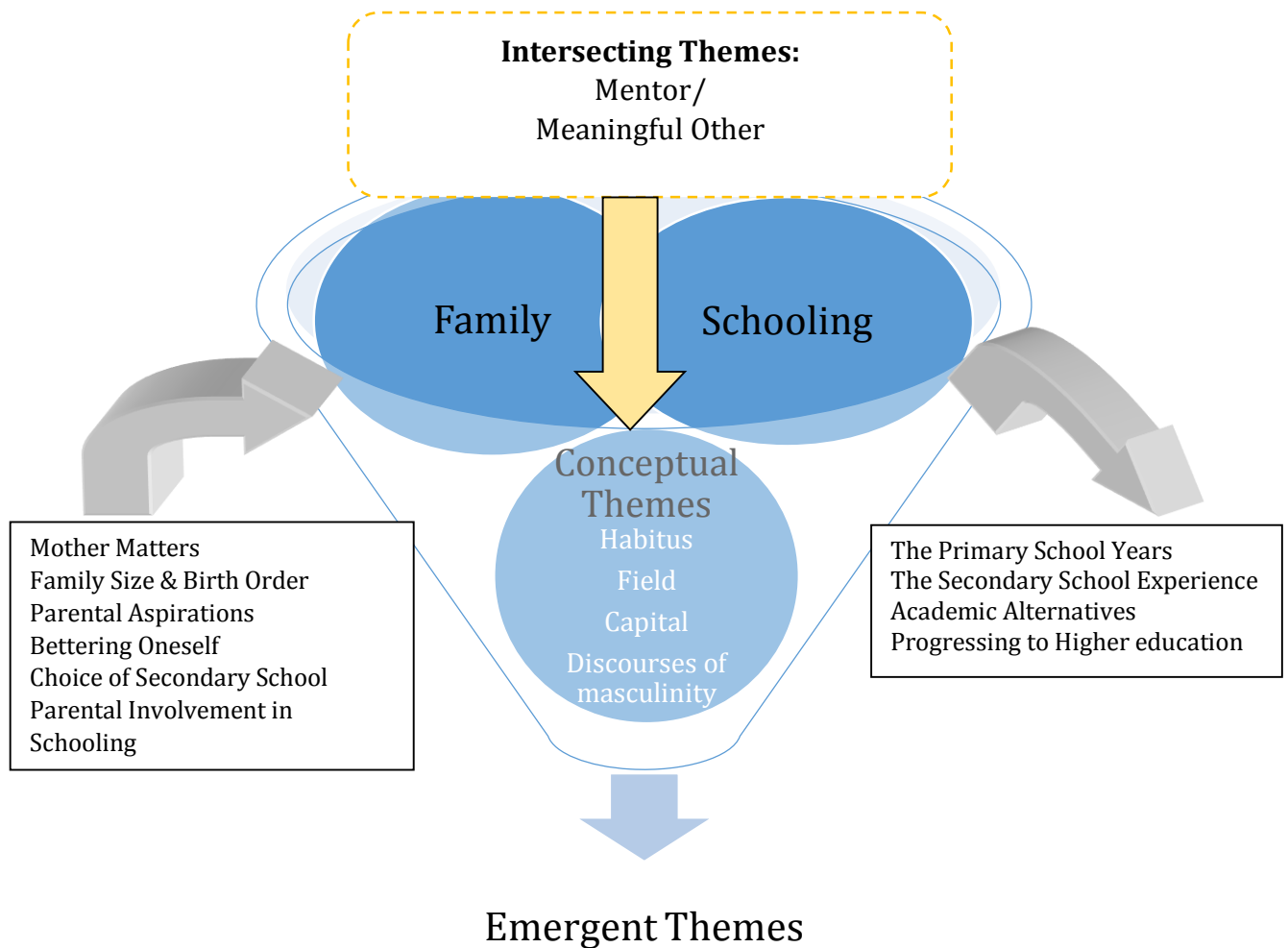
In this chapter I critically explore how my fifteen participants successfully negotiated the school system and then went on to obtain admittance to university. I will be drawing on data obtained from the initial in-depth interviews I undertook with them in the autumn of 2012 when the young men were in the first term of their second year of university. In this chapter I focus on the habitus and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984) these young men accessed at home, the influence of the fields of primary and secondary school and, in some cases, the sixth form college the participants attended. I also explore the influence of some versions of masculinities on the young men's academic progress. In doing so I will address my first research question:

- How do academically successful white working class young men account for their achievements?

As explained in the Chapter Three, fifteen young men eventually agreed to participate in my research. In this first interview I concentrated on the family lives of these young men as well as their school experiences and the processes

they went through in obtaining admission to university (see Table 3.1 in Chapter 3).

Diagram 4:1: Emergent themes from my data analysis



Emergent Themes

From my coding and analysis a variety of themes emerged. In this chapter I consider the dominant ones, those that persistently occurred through the interview (see Diagram 4:1).

One of the most significant themes was the role that the family, and in particular, mothers played in providing a supporting role for these young men.

Many of the young men in my sample could read before they went to school and when they were in the early years of school their mothers would hear then read but as they progressed through the grades the role of their mothers became one of support rather than help in the academic sense. Craig recalls that while his mother did not help him academically she was 'a solid rock through everything'. The family habitus that most of the young men were exposed to espoused the benefits of academic success. The young men in my sample came from small families of between one and three children; perhaps having fewer children enables parents to spend more time with each child and finances may be easier in smaller families.

Another key emergent theme was that many of my cohort experienced academic success early in their lives, only one of the interviewees had negative feelings about their primary school years. However, there were divergent experiences at secondary level. The institutional habitus, of some of the schools my cohort attended was not always conducive to achieving academic success. This appeared to change for most of them in the last two years of their schooling when it became non-compulsory. As Leon explained:

...most people are there (in the sixth form) for a good reason... The discipline problem is partly resolved... they don't think you are odd if you are exceptionally good because most people are.

Most of the young people who stayed at school beyond the compulsory leaving age did so because they wanted to go on to some form of higher education. This was a cohort who generally valued education. Many of the discipline problems

that occurred in the early years of secondary school, as described by the participants in my study, appeared to lessen once they were in further education. Those in my study who wanted to achieve academically and had described themselves as 'geeks' (as Craig said 'I was always picked on because I was goofy') earlier on in secondary school found themselves with more like minded students in the post-compulsory setting of the sixth form or further education college. In some ways, it seemed as if the dominant forms of masculinities that many of my respondents reported in the compulsory school setting were replaced by a pro-school, pro-school work ethic in their sixth forms. It was acceptable and not uncommon to be a 'geek'.

For many of the young men the process of getting to university was complex. Some spent three years in the sixth form in order to obtain the necessary qualifications to attend university – they showed persistence and resilience. These attributes helped them navigate their way into and through the higher education institutions they found themselves in. Many of the participants had mentors who had instilled in them the benefits of a good education.

An effect of 'fractions of class' was apparent in my cohort. Hoggart (1957) explains that one should not forget '...the great number of differences, the subtle shades, the class distinctions within the working classes...' (p. 11) and Maguire (1997) tells us: 'It is a frequently made mistake to think that working-class culture is not as variegated and internally differentiated as any other' (p. 92). In my study I found that while all the participants defined themselves and their families as working class, their mothers' occupations varied markedly (as can be seen in Table 4:1). This may have resulted in families having different access

to forms of economic capital, and it is an aspect that I return to later in the chapter.

Table 4:1: Mother's level of education and current employment

Participant's name	Mother's level of Education	Current Employment
Adam	Art College	Teaching
Ben	Left school at 15/16	Medical secretary
Craig	Left school at 15/16	Receptionist
David	Left school at 15/16. Recently completed a degree in nursing	Nurse
Edward	Left school at 15/16	Housing officer
Frank	Left school at 15/16	Works in the retail trade
Graham	Left school at 15/16	Teaching assistant
Harvey	Left school at 15/16	Nurse
Ian	Left school at 15/16	Teaching assistant
John	Further Education	Works in a radiography department
Karl	Left school at 15/16	Child minder
Leon	Art College	Teaching Assistant
Mark	Further Education	Business Advisor in a job centre, made redundant in 2013.
Nathan	Left school at 15/16	Secretary/personal assistant
Oliver	Further Education	Working with people with severe learning disabilities

Not all the young men went straight from school to university. Two of the participants Nathan and Oliver, had initially decided not to go to university. Nathan went straight to work after completing his BTEC but after a year spent working in a supermarket applied to university. Oliver also went straight to work from school:

because Dad sort of knows what he is talking about with money so, I was just like follow that kind of thing and not go to university and as it is such a lot of money, a waste of money kind of thing.

However Oliver visited a friend at university and after that visit he decided to apply to university. He told me 'I saw what university was like, I was like I've got to go to university, I have got to go, I don't care where I go or what I do, I have got to go'. Oliver was also the only participant attending a modern university who had taken A levels (six of the other participants at modern universities completed a BTEC [Business and Technology Council National Diploma) and one entered university through an access programme]. In his second year of university Oliver had severe personal/emotional problems and left university to return the following year. On his return he discovered that the programme he had originally been on, a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) programme, was no longer on offer and he was offered a place on the Sports Science programme instead.

Another participant, Edward, had originally enrolled at a modern university only to withdraw after the first term and then accepted a place the next

academic year at a different modern university where I met him. The reason he gave for leaving the original university was that he wanted to live at home.

Craig was the only participant to experience any form of private education. He attended a private grammar school in the sixth form. I will now go on to discuss the key themes that emerged from my analysis (see Diagram 4:1).

Mother matters

In their classic study, undertaken in the early 1960's, on working class families whose children went on to grammar school (for more detail see Chapter One), Jackson and Marsden (1966) found in the families they studied 'that the centres of power usually lay with the mother' (p. 97). This pattern emerged with my sample. Mark explained that 'my Mum actually put our house up for sale because she wanted us to live in the catchment area' of a good secondary school. Harvey recounts that his mother was the instigator of them visiting universities. 'This was all my Mum's doing, my Dad and I were like, 'do we have to go?'' He also recalled that 'my Dad just sort of like sat back and let my Mum take control of me'. 'She tries to influence me in *everything*,' Nathan tells me when talking about his mother.

Matthys (2013) conducted a qualitative investigation, between 2006 and 2010, into the life stories of 32 Dutch nationals from working class backgrounds who had attended university in the sixties and/or seventies, each of them was the first in their families to attend university. Matthys (2013), like Reay (2005), also found that in educational matters it was the mothers who had exercised most influence. The mothers of the participants in my study appeared to have the cultural capital necessary to encourage their sons to pursue higher education.

All these young men came from families where the mother consistently emphasised the importance of education. Karl recalls his mother saying '...you do well in education you will be able to succeed... Get a good education, go to university and it should all be good'. Oliver recalls that his mother would not let him go out after school, 'you are not leaving, you are doing the revision'.

The respondents in my study emphasised their parents' desires for them to have better lives than they did. Nathan, whose father was a bricklayer, recounted that 'My Dad said you don't want to be stacking shelves in Somerfield for a living'. Walkerdine, Melody & Lucey (2003) made the point that the working class girls in their study who did well at school all saw higher education as an escape mechanism, 'one which can be closely connected to their parents' explicitly articulated wish for their children to have better lives than they did' (p.294). Leon explained that he and his mother never had much money and that his mother made him aware that a good education would give him the opportunity of '... having enough money so you don't struggle and having a life that enables you to explore what you're interested in'. Education was seen by many of the parents as the means by which their sons could become socially mobile and improve their economic situation.

Hutchings and Archer, in their 2001 study, interviewed 109 working class young people of which 72 were in further education, while the remainder had left school at 16 and were working. Of the 109 young people who were interviewed only 16 expressed any interest in going on to higher education and these 16 young people came from families that had a tradition of 'bettering yourself' (p.88). All the participants in my study, like the 16 in the Hutchings and Archer study, appeared to come from working class families who

understood the benefits of education, in particular the ability to become socially mobile through the process of completing a higher education degree.

One of my participants, John, informed me that his parents had been 'underestimated when they were kids. I think they let that get to them and they didn't realise how good they were...' Because they themselves had these negative academic experiences as youngsters, John's parents actively encouraged him to achieve. Oliver reported that his mother had told him '...your strength is your brain not your hands... so I was like fair enough'. Most of the participants in my study, like those in Hutchings and Archer's study, 'spoke of strong family encouragement to study' (2001, p. 88) and the family belief that higher education would enable 'economic success and a more affluent lifestyle' (Hutchings & Archer, 2001, p. 86). The young men in my study seemed bound into a culture of escape and bettering themselves. The habitus of the home and the cultural values that their parents held instilled in their sons the benefits of higher education.

Most of the young men in my study recall their mothers or fathers reading to them and encouraging them to read and most claim to have been able to read before they started formal school. 'Reading offers young people a way to distinguish themselves... and provides tools to compete with peers belonging to a higher class' (Matthys, 2013, p. 225). Ben recalls that it was his father who read to him when he was a toddler. 'My Dad used to sit me down with picture books and kind of say what this is and what's that?' John also recalls that his father 'helped me extend myself... when I was younger we'd like sit on the carpet and he would make us do our tables and stuff'. This involvement of the father was unusual in my study. Generally 'it is mothers who are making

cultural capital work for their children' (Reay, 2005, p. 113) though, beyond primary school, the mothers of the participants in my study did not generally get involved in the role of 'educator'.

I found in my study that most of the participants' reported that their mothers did not feel adequately enough educated to help their sons academically once they entered secondary school. As Reay (1998a) found in her study on mothers, while working class mothers were engaged in the educational processes their children were going through they generally had fewer cultural and economic resources, fewer educational qualifications and less knowledge about the education system than middle class mothers. For these reasons they felt less able to help their children with their education as the children progressed into secondary school (Reay, 1998). They appeared to conceptualize 'their relationship to schooling as one of complementing the education their children received' (Reay, 2005, p. 110). Their role while passive was supportive. They were there to support their children through the education process. As Craig recalls '...she (his mother) had the most profound effect on my academics because she would always listen even if she didn't understand'.

In my participants' families, mothers appeared to have the cultural knowledge and the understanding that education could, as Savage (2000) explains, enable their children to improve themselves economically. Savage (2000) goes on to explain that in contemporary society, people experience diversity of cultural experiences with greater ease and as a result the 'traditional patterns of cultural distinction fragment' (p 117).

The participants' mothers are all in employment, as Table 4:1 shows, and it is possible that some of them have improved their cultural knowledge through their employment, experiencing what Savage (2000) refers to as 'different cultural styles' (p.117). Four of the mothers work in education and perhaps working in schools has increased their knowledge of what education options are available. Karl's mother is a child-minder and her charges are a teacher's children. Karl did tell me in his interviews that it was this teacher who informed his mother of how best he could achieve entrance to university when he did not do as well as expected in his A levels. These parents instilled in their sons a notion of 'bettering yourself' (Archer & Hutchings, 2000). For these parents 'the benefits of having a degree were constructed as an almost mythical ticket to social mobility and a good life' for their sons (Archer & Hutchings, 2000, p. 565).

Family size and birth order

The young men I interviewed came from small families, on average 2.3 children per household (see Table 4:2). In their study, Jackson and Marsden (1966) found that of those working class children who stayed at grammar school till the age of 18, over half were either only children or had only one sibling and that children from small families (across all social classes) performed better on intelligence tests than those from larger families (Jackson and Marsden, 1966). More recently, a study conducted by Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart (2008) found that children from larger families (those with three or more siblings) showed significantly lower attainment in reading at age 10. In my study, perhaps having a smaller family enabled the parents to focus more of their economic and cultural capital on each of their children. No participant in my study spoke of extreme poverty though most participants had been on or

were entitled to free school meals at some time in their lives. One participant recalled having school meals on the days his mother did not have any food at home, and some referred to their fathers working long hours or holding down more than one job. For example, Ian told me that his father ‘worked two jobs. So he was at a chemical factory thing and also did cheffing at a nearby rugby club’.

Table 4.2: Sibling numbers and their higher education history/plans

Adam, 3 of 3	Two older brothers. One went to a music academy and now works in that music academy. The other brother has special needs and lives at home.
Ben, 1 of 2	A younger sister who plans to go on to H.E.
Craig, 1 of 2	A younger brother who does not plan to go to university
David, 2 of 2	An older brother who has not been in H.E. and is currently unemployed
Edward, 2 of 3	An older sister and a younger brother neither of whom have been in H.E.
Frank, 3 of 3	An older brother and an older sister neither of whom have been in H.E. One works in a fast food outlet and the other in a restaurant
Graham, 1 of 2	A younger sister who has been out of schooling for 3 years due to ill health
Harvey, 2 of 2	An older sister who left school at 16, currently unemployed
Ian, 2 of 3	An older brother is at a modern university. A younger sister still at school

John, 2 of 3	An older sister who read biology at university and is a teacher and a younger sister who is still at school
Karl, 1 of 3	Two younger sisters. One is at a modern university the other is at school
Leon	Only child
Mark	Only child
Nathan, 1 of 2	A younger brother who does not plan to go to university
Oliver, 1 of 2	A younger brother who is not planning to go to university

Most of my participants were the first in their families to go on to higher education. In two families my participants are only children, in three families younger siblings were undecided about their academic futures and, as can be seen in Table 4:2, eleven of the participants' nineteen siblings had/have no plans to access higher education. Thus it can be seen from these examples that going to university is not a given in these families. So while the participants in my study have successfully navigated their way through the school system and are attending university, their siblings did not or do not necessarily plan to do so. The route into higher education is not straight forward for those with working class origins (Clegg, 2011) and that leads one to ask the question: what it was in the participants' habitus that might have led them to achieve academically while in some cases their siblings did not? Could it be place in the family? In my study two young men were only children, six were the eldest in the family and four were the youngest while three were middle children. Did

this have any effect on the cultural values and cultural knowledge the parents were able to pass on to their children?

Some research suggests that birth order does have an impact on a child's academic achievement. Black, Devereux and Salvanes (2005), using the population of Norway as their sample, found that earlier birth position was directly linked to the number of years spent in education. Their research showed that there was a steady decline in a child's time in education by birth order. Herrera, Zajonc, Wiczorkowska & Cichomski (2003) also reported, in their review of four studies on birth rank, that first and earlier born participants tended to stay in education for a significantly greater number of years. Similarly, a longitudinal study conducted over a 25 year span of more than 1000 (young adults) by Fergusson, Horwood and Boden (2006) found a correlation between birth order and educational achievement with later born children less likely to gain the educational qualifications of their elder siblings. My study is much smaller than any of these studies and birth order is not an area that I have the resources to research in greater detail but it is worth signalling that my findings were similar to the studies I have referred to here.

Parental aspiration

The alleged lack of parental aspiration for their children's education has often been cited as a barrier to working class educational achievement (Demie & Lewis, 2010b; DCSF Report, 2010; Mills and Griffiths, 2011). In my study the participants all spoke positively about their parents' aspirations for them. Ben recalls that his parents encouraged him to sit his 11 plus exams and go to grammar school, they also encouraged him to apply to university. Adam

explains that he was encouraged to do well academically: 'I was always told I should try my best as I was wasting opportunities if I wasn't'.

'Aspiration may be considered a feature of cultural capacity' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010, p. 477), and, as I suggested earlier, perhaps the parents of my participants understood that 'It is possible for children from lower social classes to do well at school, obtain degrees and move into middle class employment: (that) it is a vehicle for social mobility' (Savage, 2000, p. 89). It appears as if all of the participants' parents promoted within their children the notion that education was a key to social mobility. Savage explains that:

Cultural capital can be converted into economic capital by socializing children into performing well in the educational system, thereby allowing them to acquire good qualifications and move into well paid jobs (Savage, 2000, p.106).

As Leon explained, 'My Mum has always been, really valued education and knew that I was bright and that I could do well if I wanted to... she feels now that she made the wrong choice in terms of her career earnings'. Leon was brought up by his mother, he never knew his father. He also explained that he saw his grandmother and uncle as part of his immediate family. While they did not live in the same house they did live very close by and had been actively involved in Leon's upbringing. Leon's aunt had done medicine at an elite university and it appears as if the habitus in which Leon grew up was one in which he was exposed to the economic benefits of a good education.

Interestingly several of the parents themselves had gone on to higher education later in life. David informed me that his mother had 'recently, about five years

ago she did like a degree to like further enhance her nursing skills'. John recounts how his father was made redundant in 2007 and recently went on to university to do a maths and education degree. In the process their mentoring role was reversed:

I have been helping him out with his university course rather than helping me out... he is quite demanding in that respect, you know you help him once, you will help him through his entire degree course for the whole three years! (John).

All the respondents in my study appear to have experienced to a greater or lesser degree what Kiernan & Mensah (2010) refer to as 'positive parenting'. Positive parenting involves: offering children cognitive stimulation, promoting play and learning, providing security and warmth in relationships, being sensitive in interaction and responses to children's needs, providing physical nurturance and establishing appropriate boundaries (Kiernan and Mensah, 2010). These things have been shown to positively affect children's wellbeing (Demo & Cox, 2000; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Kiernan & Mensah, (2010) using longitudinal data from the UK Millennium Cohort Study found that:

children from poor families and those with lower levels of family resources who experienced more positive parenting were more likely to be doing well in school, and the differences were quite marked (p. 328).

As previously mentioned, several of the participants informed me that they could read before they went to school, for example Leon said: 'I was taught to

read before I went to school and always enjoyed reading'. Others told me that their mothers insisted on them doing their homework before they were allowed to go outdoors to play with their friends, for example Harvey commented: 'They were out playing football and I had to come home and do my homework'.

Discipline was mentioned by many of the participants. Adam told me that 'I was always forced to behave'. Others mentioned a nurturing family environment.

Leon said 'it has just basically been a very interesting environment to grow up in'. Adam told me that: 'My parents were always very supportive'.

The fact that the young men in my study have experienced this positive sort of parenting seems to have given them the confidence to experience the unfamiliar. Frank explains that his mother 'is very supportive of *that* (Frank going to university) and like yes she has always been there when I've needed her'. With the security of knowing that his mother would always be there when needed, he could move confidently forward. As with Matthy's study, my cohort portrayed their parents 'as loving and good at parenting and only wanting the best for their children' (2013, p. 33).

As explained earlier, not all the children in each participant's family went on to higher education. This was also apparent in my earlier study (Travers 2011) and it is a somewhat complex matter as it problematizes the concept of habitus. Perhaps this is a reflection of the 'individualization' that Savage (2000, p. 106) suggests is possible within Bourdieu's concepts of culture and habitus. A person can acquire the necessary cultural values and cultural capital to perform well in the education system which in turn allows them to transform their individual habitus (Savage, 2000).

Mentor/meaningful other

Mentors are sometimes referred to as 'meaningful others' (Carbone & Johnson, 2007). Those being mentored have been shown to develop positive attitudes toward the activity that they engage in with their mentor. Research has shown this to be the case for students who are mentored in the school environment (Blinn-Pike, 2007; Tennenbaum, Crosby and Gliner, 2001).

Mentoring was important for the academic success of all the young men in my study. Most of the participants could recall a teacher who mentored them and sometimes a 'meaningful other' in the form of a brother or other adult who fulfilled that role. Frank described his older brother as his 'hero' '...when I needed a Dad and needed someone to look up to... he was always more than happy to help'. This brother 'helped' in an emotional way, offering advice and practical support. Frank recalls, when he learnt that he had been offered a place at university, his brother telling him 'how proud he was of me'.

Craig described how his mother '...was very, very, supportive all the way though and has encouraged me to do the best I can at school'. It was, however, only when his mother met a new partner that Craig realised that he could do much better. Craig recounts: 'So when Jim came along he was... 'you know you are clever, you should try and do what you want to''. Mentors can help their charges set and realize personally relevant goals (Ramaswami and Dreher, 2007).

Mentors can also raise aspirations providing access to a different kind of social and cultural capital. Craig went on to study at an elite university.

Some participants had teacher mentors in both primary and secondary school whilst for others it was at one or the other. Harvey recalls having a mentor in

both primary and secondary school. In Year 5 he recounts how 'I was quite good at maths so she (the year 5 teacher) sort of like said, would you like to come and do this after school and stuff, so I just sort of done that'. He was in the gifted and talented programme for maths in secondary school. He explained that 'our maths teacher was head of it (the gifted and talented programme), so that is how I got into it'. Craig recalls a teacher at secondary school who would come in on a Saturday morning to give him extra lessons. 'She was fundamental in allowing me to realise that I could go far... I remember her saying I was just like a sponge'. Mentoring had a positive effect on these young men's academic performances (Spencer, 2007).

Ian, who is now doing maths and computer science at an elite university recalls his maths GCSE teacher providing him with extra learning opportunities. He recounts that his teacher said to him "I can start teaching you some calculus' and so he just kind of, he encouraged us to go further forward instead of just doing the work we kind of easily could do and stopping there'.

Mentoring can expose those being mentored to educational opportunities that motivate them to seek out new experiences and enhance their social and cultural capital (Spencer, 2007). John recalls with affection his politics teacher, at the sixth form college, who convinced him to apply to an elite university. This teacher took some of the students to visit two elite universities. '...which is why I applied here (the university he is currently studying at) and he is very helpful, and, sometimes he brings me back to the (6th form) college to speak to the kids there that are dying to ask me questions'.

Mentors or meaningful others can help those they are mentoring to raise their aspirations,

...the teachers I had for English and history were very, very strong and they basically, they discussed university a lot more with you and really tried to improve our work and get you to degree standard (Leon, who is currently at an elite university reading English).

Only one young man, Edward, claimed to have had no teacher mentor. The other 14 all recalled at least one teacher who had provided academic stimulus, support and guidance as well as non-academic support (Jacobi, 1991). Frank recalls his tutor in years 10 and 11 saying to him 'look you are heading the same path as your brother, stop it'. Frank goes on:

I was just like 'oh' because my brother mucked about so he didn't really go into year 11... he (the teacher) said it would be a waste if I just kept mucking about and it made me realise yes I need to get on.

Frank's teacher mentor was acting in a paternalistic and 'intense' manner (Jacobi, 1991). He provided Frank with the wake-up call that jolted Frank into the realisation that if he wanted to achieve his ambition of being a teacher he had to change his behaviour.

When the participants spoke about their teacher mentors it was always in positive terms and it does seem that these teachers had 'recognized something in these children' (Matthys, 2013, p. 101.) Lentz & Allen (2007) also suggest that 'mentors seek out protégés based on ability, willingness to learn' (p. 162)'.

The young men in my study had teacher mentors who had access to ‘middle class’ cultural and social capital. They also modelled the usefulness of academic study, being pro-school and having aspirations to attend university, values that may not always sit well with some versions of masculinity that challenge these values. These teacher mentors used their capital to encourage their young protégée’s to mobilize themselves. They encouraged the young men in my study to develop their own cultural and social capitals, achieve academically and mobilize their ‘positions in social space’ (Crossley, 2008, p. 97). According to Bourdieu (1984) each class occupies a position in social space which over time has been shaped and formed by the members within it. Each class has its own habitus and cultural capital and the individuals within it understand ‘where they belong in *society* (my italics) and what is, and what is not, ‘for the likes of us’ (Crossley, 2008, p.97). As stated earlier, the young men in my study have mobilized themselves with the help of their mentors and believe in the value of education.

The primary school years

Table 4:3: Primary schools attended by the study participants

Adam	Local primary school
Ben	Local primary school
Craig	Local primary school
David	Originally the local primary school, then two others
Edward	Parents applied for him to go to Roman Catholic primary school but it was oversubscribed so he went to the local primary school
Frank	Local primary school
Graham	Local primary school
Harvey	Local primary school

Ian	Local primary school
John	Roman Catholic primary school
Karl	Local primary school
Leon	Local primary school
Mark	'Better' of two local primary schools
Nathan	Church of England primary school
Oliver	Local primary school

Most of the participants went to their local primary school (see Table 4:3) but three sets of parents actively chose particular schools. Mark's parents had two primary schools to choose from in their local catchment area and the one chosen was done so because as Mark recounts 'Mum knew a teacher... and she had given her loads of positive reviews so that was that!' Nathan's mother had to drive him to school because it was quite a distance from home. Nathan recalls that '...there were two or three closer (schools) than the one I went to... It was a C of E'. (Church of England). John's mother sent him to the Roman Catholic primary school which was also some distance from their home. It appears that these parents had been able to access what is considered middle class knowledge and beliefs - the cultural and social capital to understand that not all schools are equal (Bourdieu, 1984) and that their sons would potentially benefit academically from attending certain schools instead of others.

The young men I interviewed reported mixed experiences at primary school and, though most felt that they did achieve academic success early on, some recount that their time in the primary school years was not enjoyable. Graham told me that 'I didn't really enjoy school much in primary school because there wasn't any motivational figure or anything'. He went on to explain '...the stuff we were doing in primary school was really, really basic and not particularly

interesting'. So while he experienced academic success, he did not enjoy the experience. On the other hand, Oliver has very fond memories of primary school '...it was fantastic, absolutely fantastic. Lovely teachers, lovely staff, lovely setting, beautiful facilities but a bit of a shock when I went to secondary school'. Ian recalls that in primary school, 'I think I was pretty aware that I was brighter than the rest of them'.

Two of the young men mentioned that they had had special needs and this caused them some problems at primary school. David recalls 'I was quite disruptive I think, I have, like dyslexia and I think struggled quite a lot with learning and didn't really understand, so I got moved quite a lot, from about three primary schools'. Leon also experienced problems:

I received a diagnosis of Asperser's syndrome and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) when I was about 10 but before that I tended sort of to have temper tantrums... and be quite argumentative and hyperactive and not really know why and get into trouble for that and that meant I often found it hard to sort of have and maintain relationships with other people and teachers.

He went on to reveal that once he had been diagnosed:

...it made it easier for me to understand why I would often feel what I did and also it made it easier for my family... this was just before I went to secondary school so it felt like a new start and I was able to start that off positively.

The diagnosis was a release for Leon as it enabled him, his family, and his teachers to understand that his problems were due to having Asperger's syndrome not bad behaviour and as he said, he had the opportunity of a 'new start'. Leon's mother, who is a teaching assistant, perhaps understood the educational value of getting her son diagnosed through her ability to access the appropriate cultural capital. Did she know that once her son was diagnosed he would receive extra provisions at school and that his 'bad' behaviour would be seen in a different light?

Having two participants with special needs in a sample of 15 led me to briefly examine the literature on the prevalence of their conditions in the general population. It is recognised that up to 10% of all children have dyslexia (British Dyslexia Association, 2013; Dyslexia Research Trust, 2013), while the ratio of males to females is 2:1 in moderate cases of impairment increasing to 4:1 in severely impaired cases (Hawke, Olson, Willcutt, Wadsworth & DeFries, 2009; Nicolson & Fawcett, 1999). Autism-spectrum conditions, of which Asperger's syndrome is one, are found in 1% of the population (Rutter, 1978; Baird, Simonoff, Pickles, Chandler, Loucas, Meldrum & Charman, 2006; Baron-Cohen, Scott, Allison, Williams, Bolton, Matthews & Brayne, 2009), and 3-4% of the population of the UK has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Ford, Goodman & Meltzer, 2003; Young, Adamou, Bolea, Gudjonsson, Muller, Pitts, Thome & Asherson, 2011), with the ratio of males to females being 4:1 (Brugha, 2009; 2011; Weintraub, 2011). These figures indicate that my population is broadly representative of the general population for autism spectrum conditions but slightly below average for the dyslexic population.

All but one participant felt that they had experienced academic success at primary school so they moved on, positively, to secondary school. Ben, who went to an academically selective school, recalls that:

...there was like a general positive feeling and kind of in
year 6 when we were applying to secondary schools,
because it is a grammar school area so we sat an 11 plus...
so we were encouraged to do that... we did practice tests...

He went on to attend an all-boys grammar school. Three of the young men went on to secondary Church schools and the remainder attended their local secondary schools.

Once again some parents seem to be aware that not all schools are the same and made concerted efforts to ensure that their sons attended secondary schools that they saw as *academically better*. These parents appear to have the cultural capital necessary to see this process through (Bourdieu, 1984) and while they all appeared to have the appropriate cultural capital they did at the same time appear to come from different fractions of the working class. I will now go on to discuss this concept of 'fractions of class' in a little more detail.

Fractions of class

The families in my sample did appear to come from different fractions within the working class, however, all the families appeared to value and encourage learning. As noted earlier, Savage (2000, p. 117) has suggested that traditional class patterns have shifted enormously in contemporary Britain. He also asserts that Bourdieu (1984) underestimated the working classes' ability to access cultural and social capital. Savage (2000) argues that the working classes have

resources that enable them to develop 'their claims to distinction'. He goes on to suggest that cultural practices are fluid, that social and cultural boundaries are porous, and 'that people can move between cultural practices with greater ease than Bourdieu's arguments about cultural capital imply' (Savage, 2000, p. 108). In my study, Adam explains that his parents emphasised the need 'to try our best and to take every opportunity, not just because our parents wanted us to do well but they wanted us to have the best chances'. Harvey recalls that 'my Mum always like wanted me to do well. So she always pushed me in the right directions... Like it was mainly her idea to come to uni'.

Generally the parents and young men in my study believed that education led to social mobility even if they did not use this expression. While one participant in my study had a parent who had gone to university straight from school and another had a parent who returned to study after being made redundant, as explained above, few participants had parents who stayed at school beyond the compulsory school age and some left school earlier. And while the parents believed in the importance of going to university, according to my participants, many of them lacked the social capital to access information about higher education that is available to middle class parents and to parents who have been to university themselves (Smyth & Banks, 2012). 'Specific knowledge about college entry and courses is not easily available at home' (Smyth & Banks, 2012, p. 272) for those students who are first generation university students. Many of these parents in the Smyth & Banks study did not distinguish between the different types of university. They have the cultural capital to know that: 'high academic qualifications traditionally tend to 'buy' good jobs with good

salaries' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.21). But they perhaps do not fully understand that:

...at the same time, as 'players' in the market acquire more capital, so it becomes devalued... there is *qualification inflation*, where over time, a given level of certification no longer guarantees the same prestigious jobs. Capital exists in ever changing configurations in relation to the fields which generate it, and, the values of its three forms are constantly being renegotiated in implicit and explicit ways (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.21).

Some of the parents of my participants do not seem to have acquired the capital needed to distinguish between the different types of university and the options they offer. They did not appear to understand that not all universities are equal and that the job opportunities available to people coming out of different universities are also different. This is what Bourdieu (1996) calls a case of misrecognition. Even the parents of the seven young men in my study who are now at elite universities did not suggest to their sons that they apply to these universities.

These seven young men had all been advised by their teachers in the sixth form that they should apply to an elite university. For most of them the possibility of going to one of these institutions had never occurred to them until then. As Craig explains:

...the teachers are incredibly supportive... and basically were like, you have got the grades for it, do it. So I did and I

got in and I just think it is mad considering that no one else in my family has gone to higher education.

The families of the young men in my study came from different fractions of class both in economic terms and in terms of the social and cultural capital available to them. As explained earlier the occupations of the parents of my participants were varied as was the income generated from their employment which resulted in all my participants' families having different levels of disposal income available to them. The differing levels of social and cultural capital available to parents can be seen when analysing the processes the families went through in choosing or not choosing a secondary school for their sons.

Choice of secondary school

Table 4:4: Secondary schools attended by participants

Name	Compulsory schooling	Post compulsory schooling
Adam	Local secondary school	Stayed on at secondary school
Ben	All boys grammar school	Stayed on at grammar school where 6 th form was mixed
Craig	Local secondary school	Independent mixed grammar school
David	Ecumenical secondary school	Local 6 th form college closest to home and considered 'quite' good.
Edward	Roman Catholic all boys secondary school	Local 6 th form college as he did not qualify to attend the RC 6 th form
Frank	Local secondary school	Local 6 th form college

Graham	Secondary school outside of catchment area	6 th form college that was good for maths and science
Harvey	Local secondary school	6 th form college that was sports orientated
Ian	Local secondary school	Local 6 th form college
John	Roman Catholic secondary school	Local 6 th form college
Karl	Secondary school chosen because he liked the look	Stayed on at secondary school
Leon	Local secondary school	6 th form chosen because it was considered the most academic in the area
Mark	Local secondary school	Stayed on at secondary school for 6 th form
Nathan	Church of England secondary school	Stayed on at secondary school
Oliver	Local secondary school	Local 6 th form college

Only one of the young men in my study, Ben, went to a selective school from years 7 through year 13 (see Table 4:4). Ben explained that there were two selective all boy grammar schools in his area as well as comprehensive schools and he went to see them all with his parents. Ben recalled that his parents encouraged him to go to one of the grammar schools and:

I kind of assumed you would probably do better if you went to like, in your qualifications if, you went to a

grammar school because the grades are higher, I wasn't blind to that.

Ben also recalls that in year 6 his teacher actively encouraged some of the children in his class to apply to grammar school '...we were encouraged to do that... we did practice tests at school and we were encouraged in that respect'. His primary school prepared those children who planned to go on to grammar school for the '11 plus' exam and Ben further explained that out of his class of 35 about 15 to 20 sat the exam of whom 8 to 10 passed. Five in total went from his class to the particular grammar school that Ben went to.

Ben had parents who encouraged him to achieve academically and a teacher who was also pro-active in encouraging him and others in his class to make certain secondary school choices. She prepared them for the '11 plus' exam as passing this exam was a necessary prerequisite for obtaining entrance to these academically selective schools.

One young man, Craig, went to his local secondary school for GCSEs and then he went to a private grammar school for the sixth form. The funds for this were made available by Craig's mother's partner, Jim. Craig explained that:

Jim was interested in academic things... he always tells me he loves John Dunne poetry but was not interested in school... and regrets that he didn't spend his intelligence wisely and so in a way channels that into me. And he said: 'Right Craig you might not be my son but I am going to give you all the money I possibly can and we are going to get

you good qualifications, we will get you the best possible start in life’.

Craig applied to the grammar school. He was required to attend some interviews at the school and was then offered a place. Jim provided different support and added economic capital. These changes in the family capital enabled Craig to apply and then attend a school that had a history of sending students deemed to be academically able to elite universities.

When it came to choosing a secondary school for Graham his mother chose a school outside of their catchment area which was oversubscribed. Graham recounts the experience:

I mean it was almost like impossible to get into the secondary school that I wanted to get into. It was either that one or one that was absolutely terrible ... it was almost like court cases and things with various parents struggling to get into this school, but I got lucky with that.

Four participants went to secondary schools that had religious affiliations. The consensus among these young men was that their parents considered that these schools were ‘better’ schools than the local comprehensives. It appears that the parents of the seven young men referred to above had the cultural capital necessary to understand the importance of ensuring that their children attended schools that they saw as offering their children ‘better’ educational opportunities. As Reay et al., (2005) explain ‘it is clear that some families chose schools for their children to ensure access to particular institutional habituses’ (p. 36).

This concept of *institutional habituses* (Reay, 1998a, Reay, Ball & David, 2001) is used to describe the different social and learning experiences offered by different educational institutions. The institutional habitus of an educational organisation is developed over time and includes:

curriculum offer, organisational practices, and less tangible, but equally important, cultural and expressive characteristics...(the) embodied cultural capital - embodied in the collectivity of the students (Reay et al, 2010, p. 109).

The seven young men described above appeared to have had parents that understood directly or indirectly that a school's particular habitus will structure a child's disposition towards learning (Reay, 1998a; Reay, et al, 2005). These parents contrast sharply with those parents that Gewirtz et al (1994) in their study on parents and the education market-place called 'disconnected' (p. 3).

While these 'disconnected' parents felt that schooling was important and they were concerned about the educational welfare of their children, they took for granted that their children would go to the local school (Gewirtz et al, 1994). In my study too, some of the parents did not engage with the choice process. Craig told me that his mother never thought of the possibility of sending him to a secondary school other than the local one. As he recalls, 'I went where everyone else went... a comprehensive that was in special measures when I went there'.

In the Gewirtz et al. study (1994) some parents left the choice of schools to the child, as was the case with one participant in my study, Karl. He explained that 'I just chose it (the secondary school) because that was the school I liked the look

of. He was the only child from his primary school to go to that particular school. For him the choice of secondary school was made almost randomly because he 'kind of decided yes I like that school, it looks like fun I think I want to go here'. This is far from the middle class child's experience where parents plan the transition to secondary school sometimes with an almost military precision, even buying houses in the catchment area of a good school (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995).

As mentioned earlier, Mark's mother actually put the family home on the market as she wanted to move house to live in the catchment area of what she perceived as a 'better' secondary school. Mark's mother had stayed on at school until she was 18 and had been a business advisor in a job centre until recently when she was made redundant, and appeared to have the economic as well as cultural capital of the kind available to many middle class families. As Vincent (2001) explains: 'middle-class parents can call upon resources of social, cultural and economic capital in order to exercise their voice over education issues' (p. 360). 'Middle-class families had an educational inheritance with which to endow their children' (Jackson & Marsden, 1966, p. 56) and they mobilise a variety of resources available to them to ensure the continuation of their social advantage (Reay, 1998). As it happened, Mark and his parents did not end up moving as Mark was adamant that he wanted to go to the same secondary school as his friends. He recalls his father saying 'well if he doesn't want to go then he can go to this one' (the local secondary school, Mark's choice). Unusually his mother was overruled.

The other seven young men went to one or other of the comprehensive schools local to them. Some of these comprehensive schools were known *not* to be so

called 'good' schools and two were in 'special measures'. According to Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), schools require special measures when they are failing to give pupils an acceptable standard of education (2013). Craig recounts that the secondary school that he attended was 'a comprehensive school that was in special measures when I went there... under 20% of people passed their GCSEs'. Oliver recalls that student behaviour was a problem at his secondary school; 'one teacher had her fingers broken by a student in a door because she wouldn't let us go to lunch'.

So one could ask why these parents did not choose another school for their children. We know that parents are given some choice over which school their children can attend. In reality, however, this choice of a 'better' school is not always readily available to all: '...choices take place in particular social and economically structured contexts, which mean that all individuals are to some extent constrained from being entirely free to choose' (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay & Standing, 1996, p. 398).

In the policy and popular rhetoric on parental choice there is little attention focussed on the constraints (often economic or cultural) experienced by parents which limit their choices (David, West & Ribbens, 1994). Parents do not all make their choices under the same circumstances, those 'existing on income support, living on a large council estate and reliant on public transport, will not have the same range of schools available and accessible' to them (David et al., 1996, p. 401). This was definitely the case for many of those young men in my study. Oliver recalls when I asked him what his parents thought about the problems within his secondary school, 'they didn't think it was ideal but there is not a great deal you can do really'. In reality choices are constrained by the

context the individual finds themselves in. As Reay (1998) explains, in relation to her sample of working class mothers, 'a combination of diminished resources and less social power meant that they (the working-class mothers in her study) were not able to generate cultural capital ... to anything like the extent that middle-class mothers were able to' (p. 198).

In my study there appear to be some parents who had the cultural knowledge and social connections to understand the importance of choosing a school and who possessed the economic capital to fund the travel to a school outside of the catchment area, whereas others perhaps lack the confidence to evaluate schools, the knowledge that schools do have different habituses or the economic capital to allow their child to travel further afield. They do not have available to them the middle-class capitals that enable choice (Allen et al., 2014).

Secondary schools and cultures of masculinity

In Chapter One I explored the influence that some forms of dominant masculinities can have on the academic achievement of the boys. I also explained that these versions of masculinities are often enacted within a peer group. Peer groups can provide a sense of belonging and support, they may also influence the individual with regard to attitudes to schooling, behaviour and academic outcomes (Willis, 1977; Sherriff, 2007). The peer group can act as an environment in which boys form their identities and act them out (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connell, 2000; Sherriff, 2007) and any males that do not 'fit into' the group's definition of masculinity become *othered* (Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Sherriff, 2007). The boys who perform these hegemonic masculinities are often able to gain positions of dominance within the classroom and in my

study several of the participants recall that the transition to secondary schooling being quite traumatic as they experienced being 'othered'.

Oliver explained that: 'The first couple of years were awful, I absolutely hated it... I was seen as a bit of a geek'. When I asked Frank to describe his secondary school years he simply replied 'It was an *experience*'. In their secondary schools these two young men faced a habitus with which they were not familiar. Oliver recalls that in 'year 9 I started making a couple more friends so I probably went down the wrong track a little bit, started smoking, yes thought I was cool'.

Oliver discovered that if he became part of the dominant peer group he was no longer bullied so he became part of the group. He also recalled that his studies suffered somewhat but his Mother insisted that he study when at home. This way Oliver did well academically at GCSE level while maintaining status within his peer group. While Frank was in year 7 and 8, he was very much part of the peer group engaging in dominant anti-school masculinities, in his own words, 'just mucked about, got into fights and stuff'. However on reading his year 8 report he thought 'why am I being a dick? I want to go to university and I am just ruining it for myself'.

Most of the young men in my study talked of the pressure to engage in anti-school boisterous behaviour as a way to fit in. Many of them emphasised that they did not socialize with the boys who engaged in these activities. Some participants were somewhat engaged in a sports-masculinity discourse through their participation in football/rugby and this theme is developed more fully later in the chapter. All my participants emphasised the importance of doing well educationally and this was a major focus for them.

All the young men in my study came from a cohort that is generally considered problematic in educational terms in that - they are white working class young men (see Hills et al 2010; Centre for Social Justice, 2013). Archer (2008b) in her study on minority ethnic educational success, which was explored in Chapter One, labelled the group which encompassed working class students (including white working class boys) as the '*desire denied*' and '*potential*' academic success group and as such they were the problem group. Archer described this group as having 'a relationship to success in the absence of a recognized current/actual level of examination achievement' (Archer, 2008b, p. 92). This descriptor relates to students who are seen to be underperforming in terms of their academic ability and potential for academic attainment.

As explored in Chapter One, Rollock (2006) devised a category she called *inclusive* success which was about the individual student reaching their potential. This version of success was related to those students the teachers regarded as incapable of *exclusive* academic success. *Exclusive* success involved the acquisition by students of five or more A* to C grades at GCSE level. According to Rollock these two forms of academic success were used by the teachers in a hierarchical way and tended to include and exclude certain students according to various factors such as gender, family size and composition, ethicised student subcultures and perceptions about ability (Rollock, 2006). White working class males would generally fit into the *inclusive* category.

The young men in my study could be expected to be in the group described by Archer as the '*desire denied*' and '*potential*' academic success group or Rollock's

inclusive group but all of them obtained results that enabled them to continue their education into the sixth form. Indeed eight of the young men achieved predominantly A* and A grades at GCSE level, thus they would fit into Rollock's (2006) exclusive group and into Archer's (2008b) '*traditional*' academic success chart which she defined as the 'gold standard' of achievement in national examinations. Three of the other young men in my study achieved predominantly B's and C's while the other four achieved mainly C's and D's.

Overall the young men in my group managed to 'buck the trend' and moved from compulsory education to further education fairly seamlessly. Only Edward had to change his plans for further education when he received his GCSE results. Originally he had planned to stay on at his Roman Catholic secondary school but because his 'results were the worst of my life probably... a massive wakeup call... it was a bad day...' he had to change plans. His aunt suggested to him that he go down to a particular sixth form college and apply there to do a BTEC in sport and that is what he did. His aunt had provided the cultural knowledge about further education that he lacked – he took this new found knowledge and worked with it.

Seven of the participants experienced what would be considered conventional A level routes to university and are now attending elite universities. Six of the young men came through the BTEC programme and are now studying at modern universities and one participant, Karl, came through an access programme and is now also attending a modern university. Only one young man I interviewed at a modern university had come through the A level route.

Parental involvement in secondary schooling

While some parents did actively help their sons with their academic work the majority seemed to take a back seat once their sons went on to secondary school. The parents of these young men would encourage their sons to do their homework and study and sometimes insist that their sons come indoors instead of staying outdoors and playing with their friends. However, these parents did not get involved with the school, its curriculum, teaching methods or any other aspect of the school. Not one of the participants in my study could recall their parents being involved in any aspect of their secondary schooling.

Reay (2005) found in her study on working class mothers' involvement with their children's academic work that the mother's 'own educational histories continued to exert a powerful impact on their involvement in the present' (p. 107). Generally, working class mothers did not find it natural to take control when there were educational problems. The mothers in her study did not have the cultural capital that enabled them to support their children's academic progress (Reay, 2005). Neither did they feel competent in speaking with their children's teachers as this was a habitus with which they were uncomfortable (Reay et al., 2010). On the other hand, middle class mothers saw their role as a *compensatory* one, one that involved such things as helping their children with curriculum assignments (Reay, 2005). Middle class mothers also made efforts to modify the available school provisions if they felt that this was necessary.

According to Reay (2005) this difference in involvement results in educational inequalities, with educational success becoming 'a function of social, cultural and material advantages' (p. 114). Most of the mothers in my study continued their supporting role while their sons were in secondary school but, in a similar

vein to the findings of Reay (2005) and Reay et al (2010) discussed above, they did not appear to take an active role in any of the educational aspects of their son's schooling. As Graham explained when asked what role his mother played in his secondary schooling: 'She was supportive of whatever I wanted to do and she would just encourage me to go as far as I could go basically'.

Academic alternatives

In Chapter One I explored several studies referring to young working class males' interest in football. These studies suggested that football is much more important to many young men than almost anything else including education. Power et al., (1998) found that for working class boys: 'Sporting prowess not only compensated for working hard, it could also provide an alternative or even more 'successful' identity' (p. 141). From the viewpoint of their peers, the boys who were good at football were seen as 'cool' and 'hard'. This reputation gained them the respect of their peers which was much more important to them than gaining recognition through academic achievement (Power et al., 1998). Footballing prowess was also seen by the boys in Smith's (2007) study as being the ultimate 'prestige resource in signifying 'successful' masculinity' (p. 186) and those boys who were seen to excel at football earned 'physical capital' (Smith, 2007, p.186).

In my study several of the young men's positive memories of their schooling were to do with sport and sometimes sports teachers. David recalls that the teacher that stood out for him at school was his year 6 teacher who was also the PE teacher and football coach. Six of the young men in my study played football and one played rugby. David recounts that '(I) was really good at football, so I

dominated the football team'. Mark played football for his county and he told me 'I got A's in my sports, I was always close to my sports teachers and I was captain of the football team'. Some like Harvey found that the football crowd were not the academic type. He recalls that:

the people I hung around with didn't like, they weren't really the academic sort, mainly football people. That is why I hung around with them to play football etc. And they were, like I say, always saying are you coming out? And I was like, I've got to do this (homework). As I got older I think I went away with them more.

Harvey went on to say that as he got older he tended to do his homework 'more last minute....' The young men in my study who played football/rugby gained the respect of their peers but they did engage with academic study usually because their Mothers would ensure that homework and revision work were completed.

These seven young men did go on to higher education and six of them successfully completed a sports degree. Football/rugby did not replace academic achievement, it became part of their academic profile. This specific group accessed universities which would accept them with a BTEC qualification in sport and offered courses that encompassed their passion – football/rugby. Most of these young men were encouraged to go onto university by their teachers in the sixth form, but most of them were left to do their own research into what they could study and where they could study given their qualifications. All seven attended a modern university and studied Sports

Science. What this suggest is that in these cases, my participants were able to convert their sporting capital into a form of academic capital.

Progressing to higher education... Another tale

The progression into higher education for the young men in my study was never straight forward and for some there were more obstacles in the way than for others. Adam came from a small village and went to the local primary school and the closest secondary school to his village. Of the 130 young people that were in his secondary school year group, 30 went into the sixth form and 5 then went on to university. At GCSE level Adam attained 10 A*s and 1 A. He recalls that after he did his mock GCSEs and did well it occurred to him that he was academically bright. For A levels he chose maths, further maths, physics and English literature. He dropped English literature after his AS level exams and he explained that doing the further maths ‘...was quite hard because our school didn’t have a further maths teacher or somebody who was willing to teach further maths... so I decided to teach myself’. In year 13 he was elected head boy of the school and he discovered that he was the only student to continue with the physics course. The other seven students studying physics dropped it after getting U’s in their AS exams. ‘...so that went down to just an hour of teaching a week’ Adam explained. So he was self-taught in further maths and down to one hour a week of physics tuition.

The head of sixth form encouraged him and three other students to apply to an elite university. This had never occurred to Adam and he recalls that:

our head of sixth form sat us down and said I want you
all to seriously consider these elite universities... she

was really good... she was the one who persuaded us
and when I came on the open day, I really enjoyed it but
still never thought that I would get in or had a chance of
getting in.

Adam attained 2 A*s and an A at A levels and he went on to study engineering at
an elite university.

Ben went to an all-boys state grammar school and did the IB there. He chose
this qualification above the A level route even though it was new to the school
because 'I knew at this point I would be applying to an elite university. I think I
knew I didn't want to be another 3 A candidate'. All was not plain sailing
however as his offer was two 7's at higher level with an overall offer of 40. Ben
achieved an overall score of 42 but received one 7 and 2 6's at higher level. The
head of sixth form at his school phoned the university on Ben's behalf and Ben
was told to ask for a re-mark of the papers. This he did but one of his history
papers had been lost. So his mark did not go up. Ben explained that:

obviously I phoned up (the university) and explained the
situation and said what had happened... so the tutor went
and spoke to the senior tutors that day and phoned me the
following day and said 'congratulations you've got your
place!'

Ben appears to have had the persistence, resilience and determination to press
on with his ambition of attending an elite university. He also had access to the
head of sixth form's cultural and social capital. This teacher was prepared to
make the initial telephone call to the university. Both Ben and his teacher

understood the unwritten 'rules of the game' (Maton, 2008, p.57). This was a case of habitus matching social field.

Edward was originally going to a sixth form college that had links to his school. However he did not get the necessary marks at GCSE level to do so. As, quoted earlier, he recalls on seeing his GCSE marks:

...the results were the worst of my life probably... it was a massive wakeup call... it was a bad day. But it worked out for the best because going to the other college... was better than going to...(the college he had originally planned to).

Edward spent three years at college. He informed me that in the first year he did:

the first diploma and then that was just to get on the real one, the national diploma. I got a distinction, merit, merit... it is 280 UCAS points so it is quite... I think the BTEC is an easy way to get into university. Being honest, if I had done A levels, I don't think I would be at a university like this because of the pressure and the exams because the BTEC is 100% coursework.

Edward is at university because he had an aunt who introduced him to the possibility of getting into university through an alternative route to the traditional A level route. She had the cultural knowledge and he had the desire to go to university whatever it took. He was not daunted by the prospect of having to do three years at college instead of two. Edward's data showed that

there was room for agency and change and what Bourdieu (1988) refers to as 'free play' in fields. 'Free play' occurs because the influence of what is happening in other fields and other outside influences can also affect what is happening in a field (Thomson, 2008). According to Bourdieu:

All individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result their strategies (1998, p. 41).

Conclusion

In this chapter the two theoretical perspectives that frame my research: the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, field and capital and the theoretical concept of dominant forms of masculinities are used to frame my analysis of the early life and schooling of fifteen young men.

All fifteen of the stories tell a tale of achievement *against the odds*. Persistence, resilience and sheer determination were needed by all participants at various stages in their schooling. All fifteen had to manoeuvre their way through a system that was littered with obstacles. Arrival at the destination – university – was all the more surprising and it is little wonder then that in the academic year 2011/12 (the year that the young men in my study entered university) only 20% of all young people (not just white working class young men) on free school meals entered university (BIS, 2014)!

Chapter Five

Experiences at University

These... working-class students have developed almost superhuman levels of motivation, resilience and determination...They have managed to achieve considerable success as learners and acquire the self-confidence and self-regulation that accompanies academic success against the odds (Reay et al, 2009, p. 1115).

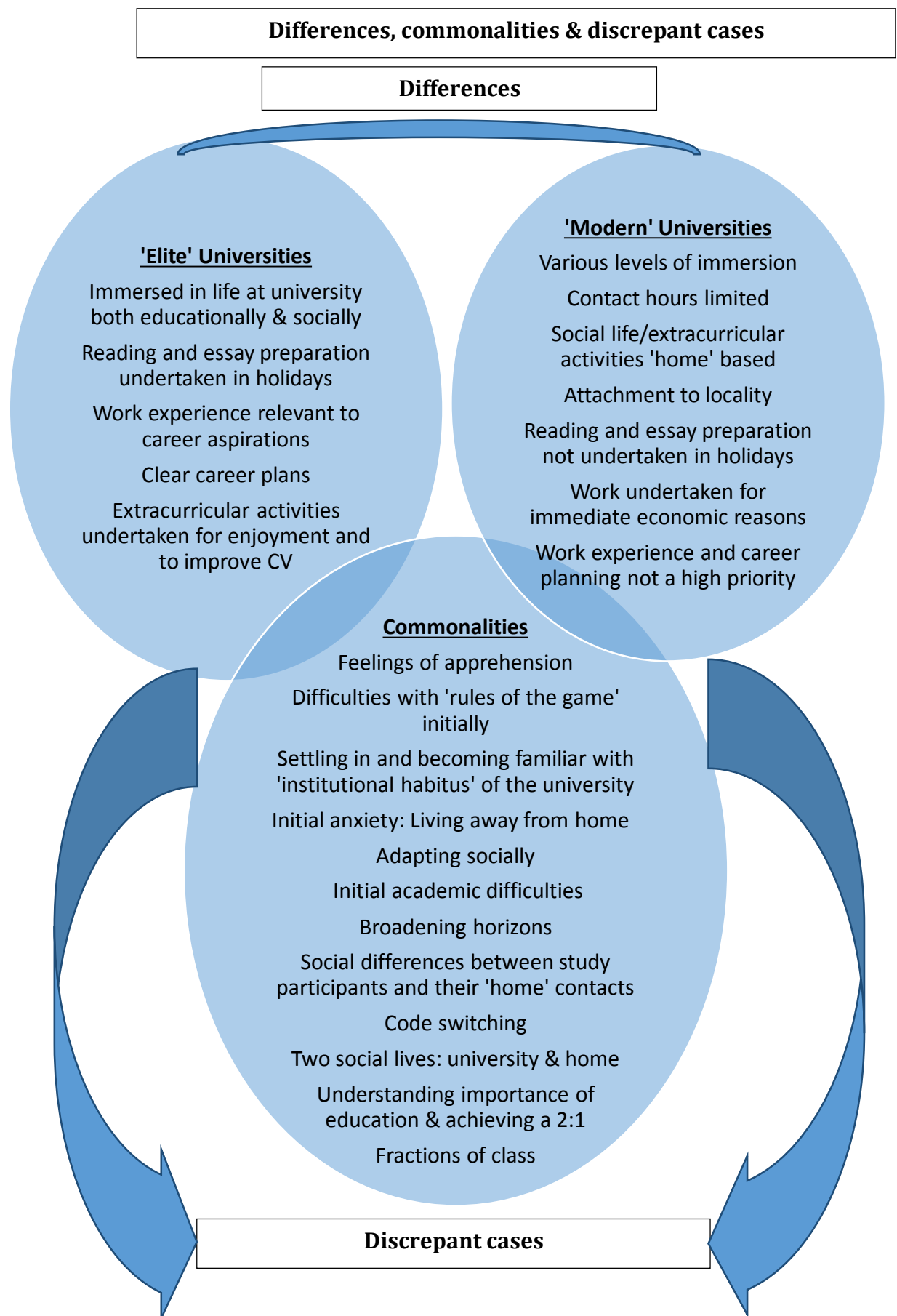
Introduction

This chapter explores how fourteen of the original fifteen young white men I initially interviewed negotiated their way through the first two years of university. I will draw on data obtained from the second set of in-depth interviews I undertook with these young men who, in all but one case, were the first generation of their families to attend university. When I undertook the interviews in the spring and summer of 2013 these young men were in the last half of their second year of university. In this chapter I address the second research question:

- How do academically successful white working class young men interpret their university experiences?

From my coding and analysis of the data a variety of key themes were identified which I have clustered as similarities, differences and discrepant cases. These will be considered in this chapter and are listed on Diagram 5:1.

Diagram 5:1 Key themes – Interview two



Only one participant, Ben, had a parent (his father) who had attended university directly from school but from the age of three Ben was brought up solely by his mother. All but Ben were receiving maintenance grants and, except for Ben, could be defined as *first generation white working class male* university attendees. One participant, Oliver, who was attending a modern university, dropped out of university sometime in the second semester of his second year. I tried several times to contact him but he did not respond.

Seven of the participants went to one or other of two elite universities and studied a range of subjects, seven went to the same modern university where they studied Sports Science and one participant attended another modern university and studied Education (see Table 5:1).

Table 5:1 Name of participants and type of university attended

Name	Type of University
Adam	Elite
Ben	Elite
Craig	Elite
Graham	Elite
Ian	Elite
John	Elite
Leon	Elite
David	Modern
Edward	Modern
Frank	Modern
Harvey	Modern
Karl	Modern
Mark	Modern
Nathan	Modern
Oliver	Modern

Commonalities

Difficulties with 'the rules of the game' and 'institutional habitus'

All the young men experienced a degree of apprehension when they first started university. They all reported experiencing difficulties in 'negotiating the (largely unwritten) 'rules of the game' of university life' (Read, Archer and Leathwood, 2003, p. 261). While the culture within the universities attended by these white working class young men was different, and, each institution has its own set of practices and discourses which comprise its institutional habitus, this had to be negotiated by the students at their university and they found that they did not always have available to them the cultural capital necessary to make this change seamlessly.

Once at university they found 'new rules of the game' to learn. Adam recalls that in his first year he:

had been just thrown in a bit and (did) not really know what to expect... at the beginning it was quite hard just because there are a lot of people who came from private schools and towards the beginning I wasn't sure I should be coming here... I remember my brother calling me... the people I was sat by... were comparing ski resorts... I was like I should not be here.

Mark recounts that:

...the first year was very hard for me because I am quite close to my Mum and Dad... I still have thoughts of if I'd stayed home and done something else. But I'm glad I did it

in the end, it is just... it is more...the detail you have to put
into your work, the amount of literature that you need to
go and read...

These examples illustrate that Adam and Mark had limited experience of the culture of higher education, its structure and organisation – its ‘institutional habitus’. They had very limited knowledge of what to expect or what to do once they arrived at university and they found that their habitus and the field or social space of the university were mismatched. This is what Bourdieu (1990b) refers to as ‘situations of crisis which disrupt the immediate adjustment of habitus to field’ (p. 109). Adam and Mark felt like ‘fish out of water’ (Bourdieu, 1984). All the participants initially felt the same way as Adam and Mark and many of them felt that ‘this is not for us’ (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 112). However as Bourdieu explains ‘habitus, as the product of social conditionings... is endlessly transformed, either in a direction that reinforces it... or in a direction that transforms it...’ (1990b, p. 116). All but one of the participants in my study ‘adjusted to the situation’ (1990b, p. 108).

By the end of second year most of the young men had settled into their university lives and most had adapted to the ‘academic culture’ and the ‘institutional habitus’ of their particular university. Most of these young men were now more like ‘fish in water’, their habitus matching the field (Bourdieu, 1990a). They had become ‘attuned to the *doxa*, the unwritten rules of the game underlying practices within that field’ (Maton, 2008, p. 57). As Craig explains:

Oh it has been a lot better than last year... obviously you
get more settled in your second year. You know what you

are up to, what is expected of you, so yes it has been good
and... I am not so stabbing in the dark... I would describe it
as settled, as successful, as fun...

When Frank was asked to describe his second year at university he replied: 'It has been fun, it has been eventful, it has been really eventful but it has been fun'. It should be added that while most of the young men had adapted to university life, this was managed to varying degrees and this aspect will be discussed later in the chapter.

All but three of the participants were living away from home. The seven young men at the elite universities were living either in halls or in houses owned by their particular Colleges. Of the eight young men attending the modern universities, three lived at home, though one of these, Harvey, lived in halls in his first year but then chose to live at home for economic reasons in the second year. Another two young men also lived at home for economic as well as 'attachment' reasons. Frank was a senior resident in halls and the other four lived in houses near the university. Most of the students talked about initially being homesick. As Craig recounts: 'you live away from home... so you have no experience of how this works and it is a worry... it is a big change... I was missing home and things like that'. Frank told me that: 'I got really homesick to start with...' Perhaps this also happens to middle class students but generally middle class students have been prepared for the intricacies of going away to university. While they may be homesick they understand the process. Whereas some working class students will have 'no experience of how this works' (Craig).

Most of the young men felt that socially they had adapted well by the end of the second year and most students attending the modern universities said they had had no difficulties adapting socially from the beginning. As Mark recounts 'I got quite close to the people I was in halls with... so it is quite good socially here'.

Most of the young men expressed initial doubts about their suitability to attend university often because of their reservations about their working class backgrounds. As both Leon and Adam recall:

Socially I thought I was going to be very intimidated by it but I made friends very quickly... I found it much better than I thought it would... whilst you imagine it is going to be a public school hotspot it is actually a more diverse range of people than you will get anywhere else and that is such a brilliant thing (Leon).

I thought it was going to be really snobby when I first arrived but it is quite normal if not a typical university experience but then again that is not why people come here (Adam).

Like those in Crozier & Reay's study, most of the students reported experiencing 'struggle, challenge, difficulty and crises of confidence, particularly in the first year' (2011, p. 151). Those at the elite universities were particularly intimidated because they had all been the 'best' in their classes at school and at university found themselves surrounded by equally clever people. As John recalls:

A levels and GCSE I just kind of went to classes and turned up at the exams and that was about it... I kind of struggled with (not being the best)... I think I have done okay... I think I am quite middle really... It is new, I am not used to it. I am kind of used to being at the top but you know I have learned to cope with it.

Craig also recalls that '... all of a sudden I am not the best... suddenly in tutorials I can't answer all of the questions and people answer it before me... I don't enjoy it...'

Ian explains that: '...coming here (an elite university) has given me some humility as well which is really good'. Those attending modern universities also reported finding the work difficult. Frank recalls that the mark he received for his first essay was very disappointing so he went and had a chat with his tutor:

and he basically said this is what you need to do when you write an essay and I realised after that mark, yes, no, university is all about self-learning... you have to go away and research....

Nathan told me that, 'At first I found it quite difficult but as soon as you get the hang of how the writing style is different and referencing and everything then it is not so bad'. These working class young men, with the exception of Ben, come to university as the first in their families to do so and have not necessarily been exposed to the 'linguistic capital' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) needed to succeed in higher education institutions:

The differences in the ability to speak and write the 'language' of academia explicitly marks out the difference in the status between (the working class) student and lecturer (Read et al, 2003, p. 271).

Adam explained that the teaching at his school (a comprehensive school in a former mining town) was so different to the teaching at his elite university but his university friends who had attended public schools told him that '...they were taught what to do and how... they had tutorials and supervisions (at school)'. They had been armed with the necessary linguistic, social and cultural capital to make a relatively effortless transition to university. This is not to say that all middle class students necessarily make the transition seamlessly.

Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) explain that educational inequalities occur because there is an 'unequal distribution of linguistic and cultural capital' (p. 76). First generation working class students do not have the 'linguistic code' which enables the university lecturer and student, 'to associate the same sound with the same sense and the same sense with the same sound' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.82). This linguistic code, the particular language of the higher educational institution, has to be acquired by the new students. The new linguistic code is part of the 'rules of the game' of higher education (Read et al., 2003) these young men have to learn. Once this code is learned it can be transformed into 'scholastic capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). This transformation can be complete but is not always so. Some working class individuals maintain a 'foot in both camps' so to speak: people may have more than one identifiable habitus. Reed-Danahay (2005) describes a primary and a secondary habitus: a primary

habitus is inculcated through the family, home and associated relationships while the secondary habitus is inculcated through the education process.

Broadening of horizons and the appearance of social differences between participants and their 'home' contacts

Most of the young men I interviewed spoke about university broadening their horizons and changing their perceptions. However, according to Reay et al. (2010), each type of university has its own 'institutional habitus' which influences the students' learner and class identities to a greater or lesser degree. Ian explains that:

...people here have elevated the level of debate for some reason... the complexity of conversation is a lot higher... I don't want to feel that I am above them when I go back (home)... I really have to change between home and uni.

Ian has found that the language of his home habitus is different from the language of the university habitus. He has to engage in 'code switching'. Code switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, language varieties or dialects and styles (DeBose, 1992). Some of the young men in my study found themselves using different 'styles' of language in different environments. That is to say that the language they use at home is different from the language they use at university. Ian has found that he has to engage in one language code at home and another at university, the same was the case for David:

I'm here and you are meeting new people and... (the) social experience you get, you learn what is appropriate to

say where some of them at home, like they have just been isolated for so long, they just don't communicate appropriately you know what I mean? It just seems like awkward, I mean I get along with them but if they are in a bigger crowd ... they just are socially not right... I have just become more independent, I don't know really I am just becoming my own person and they are still like... They are just still finding themselves.

Most of the young men in my study find themselves moving in two different social worlds as Adam explains: 'university and home just move at a totally different pace', and Nathan exclaimed '...when you are at home it is like nothing has changed!' Edward explains that the people where he lives:

...go on the same holidays... do the same things at weekends... It is just ridiculous, whereas, I want to experience everything in the world like... I have started to watch more documentaries... whether it is David Attenborough... other shows like that and you just see the world and think why would I want to be stuck... why would I want to be here all the time?

These students appear to be refashioning themselves in the wake of their experiences at university (Bourdieu, 1990). So while their habitus is being modified by their experiences at university they are still retaining their links with their home habitus (Reay et al, 2009). All my participants reported that they have 'developed new priorities, perspectives, values, and great

engagement with an intellectual world' (Aries & Seider, 2005, p. 433). They also seemed to have learned to compartmentalize the different parts of their life, 'keeping them separate but allowing them to co-exist' (Aries & Seider, 2005, p. 435).

Very few of the young men mixed with their university friends outside of university. As Harvey informed me '...in uni I have got my uni friends and when I go back home, I have got my normal friends'. This comment by Harvey that his home friends are his 'normal' friends was intriguing. He still saw his home life which equates to his working class life, as somewhat more 'normal' than the middle class 'habitus' of university. Perhaps Harvey still feels like a 'cultural outsider' at university (Granfield, 1991, p. 336)? Mark, also at a modern university, tells me that most of the people he mixes with at university 'have all got a big friendship group at home as in, back where they live'. These young men have, as many of them told me, 'two lives' that do appear to co-exist, they are retaining their links with their home habitus.

Only two of the young men, Ben and Ian, both at elite universities said that they mixed with university friends in their holidays: '...there is probably a group of about six of us and we go and stay at each other's houses' (Ben). Perhaps these young men have successfully integrated socially into their new habitus (Lehmann, 2012) or are more confident about their working class backgrounds. These two young men appeared not to feel inferior 'in relation to their old identity and habitus' (Baxter & Britton, 2001, p. 100). They had adopted the habitus of the new but were at ease with where they had come from; for them the transition appeared to have been smooth and they seem to be able to move between the two different fields with ease.

The value of education and achieving a 2:1

All the young men in my study valued education. Several of them said that they valued higher education because it provided them with the ability to become socially mobile. When I asked Frank why he valued education his response was:

...just wanted to get out of Riverton (pseudonym for the name of the town he grew up in), I didn't want to spend my life there. Don't get me wrong, it is nice. You see people around town and you see the people stuck in dead end jobs that they hate... like I just don't want to be stuck in the same town for the rest of my life.

Leon expressed similar feelings:

...I think like always feeling a bit sort of outside of people who lived locally who were like, had done the same job for like fifty years and read the Daily Mail and this, and, never really like understanding that mindset much and always wanting something different to that to some degree. I am not saying I'm trying to rise above something...

Every participant who made reference to having changed or who had explained that they wished to move on was also very quick to point out that they did not think there was anything wrong with where they had come from as can be seen from both Frank and Leon's quotes i.e. 'Don't get me wrong it is nice' (Frank) and 'I am not saying I'm trying to rise above something...' (Leon). They did not want to appear as if they thought that they were superior to those at home or

being judgemental. In a similar vein to those working class students at an elite university in Reay et al's (2009) study, most of the participants in my study:

displayed the ability to successfully move across two very different fields, combining strong connections and loyalties to the family and home friends with what are seen to be classically middle-class academic dispositions (p. 1105).

As Leon explained: 'I don't feel as alienated as it would suggest with two different lives but, yes, they are different spheres'.

All these young men understood the importance of achieving at least a 2:1 in their degree in order to secure future employment. Since being at university they have learned that being there is about more than just getting a degree. Craig explains that he is hoping to work in the Civil Service: 'they put you through a few kind of hoops in your final year to see if they definitely want to take you on, so you have to get a 2:1'.

All the participants in my study understood that, in the current economic climate in the UK, employment opportunities were difficult to obtain and they all appeared to understand that a pass at degree level was not necessarily enough to secure employment, it needed to be a good pass, at least a 2:1. The young men who were considering postgraduate study also understand that they needed a good pass, at least a 2:1 or in some cases a first in order to go on to postgraduate study. These young men had come to understand the dispositions of this field, the 'rules of the game'. They understood that the particular degree they were studying for had an exchange value in the work place depending on

the mark obtained. They also understood that the degree they were studying for had a different value to other degrees. Those at the modern universities understood that their degrees were subject specific and that the career options opened to them would be in the field of study they were undertaking at university. Therefore the young men studying Sports Science saw themselves going into some sport related occupation such as football coaching or P.E. teaching and the young man studying education saw himself following a career in that field.

Not all the young men were planning to leave university on completion of their degree. Graham, who studying natural sciences, was on course to achieve a first. He planned to stay on his university and do a PhD. Leon had plans to do a Master's programme at his university and he understood that: 'unless you get a first, you basically don't get offered a place'. Some of the young men at one of the modern universities had hoped to get on to the PGCE course at their university. To do this they required a first.

These then are some of the *commonalities* experienced by these first generation white working class male university students. There are also *differences* in their experiences and none more so than that of the degree of belonging experienced at the different types of university (Reay et al., 2010).

Differences

Levels of immersion in life at university and attachment to locality

Those young men attending the elite universities were immersed in university life during term time and said that they spent extra time at the university in

their holidays usually to prepare readings, assignments or dissertations before term began. As Craig explains:

I'm coming back to university (early) mainly because I'll have to start reading... recap the stuff I've done this year and I'll have exams when I come back, not real ones but ones I'll still need to revise for.

Adam tells me that: 'I think I've *immersed* myself quite well into college life and there are lots of societies that you can be part of if you manage your time well'.

These young men are provided with university accommodation for the three years they are at university. They have more contact hours per week than their peers at the modern university. Adam recalls that one week he had 42 contact hours, whereas Nathan, who is attending a modern university, tells me: 'I've only had two modules (this semester) so 4 contact hours a week, which is a struggle to keep yourself entertained sometimes'. David who also attends a modern university said that he had 11 contact hours per week and this appeared to be the norm at the modern universities the young men in my study attended.

The participants who attend elite universities have a tutorial session for each of their modules each week. These sessions normally involve two or three students meeting up with a lecturer to discuss the essays the students have completed that week. At the modern universities where tutorials were held very infrequently and with much larger groups. Karl, who attends a modern university, explained that he only has 'tutorials after the essays where they go through the papers with us...' Their work load appears to be much heavier at the

elite universities with most students having to write at least two essays a week in contrast to the modern universities where the norm was closer to four or five a semester and where re-sits for failed assignments were the norm.

At the modern universities there are approximately 11 hours of non-compulsory lectures each week, tutorials are in large groups and very infrequent. This means that 'students with little educational capital are thrown back on themselves to make sense of the rules' (Crozier & Reay, 2011, p. 149). An example of this 'being thrown back on themselves' was given to me by Karl. It was suggested to Karl, who appeared to be struggling with his essay writing, that he visit the academic learning advisor, which he did a number of times. On one visit the advice was to 'to re-read (his essays) several times and maybe get other people to read it'. On another occasion Karl recalls 'it was more of the same thing generally just help with grammar and stuff like that...' He told me that he had not found these sessions particularly useful and continues to struggle with his essay writing.

Many of the young men at modern universities had failed essays, received limited feedback and then re-sat any failed essays at the end of the academic year. The system at the modern university appeared less structured than that of the elite university and, while the young men at the modern university could ask for help, they rarely did. Most of them felt it was up to themselves to sort out their difficulties, as Harvey explained: 'But I should learn from my mistake...' Students were required to be proactive in seeking support and most of them had difficulty with doing this. This belief among the young men at the modern universities that they had to sort out their own problems resulted in many of them not doing as well academically as they might have. It is possible to

speculate that dominant discourses, masculine hegemonies that encourage men to see seeking help as 'feminine' may be counter-productive in the university setting (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

Another difference related to how the young men socialised during term time. Many of the young men attending modern universities said that they did not spend much time socializing at university as they still maintained ties with their family and friends from home. David explained that: 'I go home quite a lot on Saturday night just to go and play football...' Mark told me that: 'I've been getting *stressed*, so I go home to do a bit of work at Mum and Dad's'. This attachment to *locality* is evident in many studies with working class communities (Ball et al., 2000; Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Ingram, 2009). For example, the working class participants in Archer et al.'s (2010) study were strongly attached to the familiar and had strong friendships and family ties that they could not be separated from. Their identity is bound up with the working class locality in which they live (Archer & Yamashita, 2003). According to Ingram (2009) for working class boys this sense of belonging within a locality brings with it a sense of security, and belonging as well as a strong social network. This was apparent in my study with most of those young men at the modern universities maintaining close ties to family and locality. As Edward explained:

I wanted to stay at home, to be honest...I didn't see a point of me living here when I could stay at home and also, yes I think that was it, I just wanted to live at home to be honest.

Many of the young men at the modern universities chose the particular university they are studying at because it was not too far away from home. When I asked Mark why he had chosen the university he is now attending, he recalled that: '...it was quite a big decision if you are going to be moving away I didn't want to be too far like (names a university in the north of the country)'. David told me that he applied to: 'the closest one (university) because obviously I wanted to come home to play football and that'. It appeared that the students in my study, attending modern universities,

...may prefer the emotional security of remaining close to family and friends while participating in the 'risky' and unfamiliar world of HE (Christie, 2007, p. 2447).

Some working class students actively choose their families as their major source of emotional support (Clegg, Bradley & Smith, 2006) and this appeared to be the case with many of the young men I interviewed who are attending modern universities. Their attachment to family, friends and locality remained strong for most of them, certainly in the first two years of university. It may also be plausible that this attachment may be more about the bonds these young men have with their local male friends and football club than family.

Work, holiday reading, work experience and future career plans

Most of the young men at the elite universities studied through their holidays; this usually involved reading in preparation for the following term's lectures. The young men attending the modern universities rarely did any study in their holidays even though they understood that they would benefit from doing extra reading and research. As Crozier and Reay (2011) found in their study of

students experiences across three different types of university and an FE College, the students at their modern university, while highly motivated to gain their degrees, somehow seemed to lack 'a sense of urgency in their attitudes to work' (p. 150).

Some of the young men attending modern universities worked part-time in term time, as well as through the holidays. The participants at the elite universities were not permitted to work in term time and were provided with bursaries so that they did not have to work in the Christmas or Easter breaks, as Ian explains:

...there is a vacation grant which is £500 for the Christmas vacation and £500 for the Easter vacation that is provided by the College. That is so we don't feel like we have to get jobs when we go home because my parents were kind of pushing me towards getting a job and that scholarship kind of said like, let me do my work over the holidays because it takes me the whole holiday to do my revision and reading and get things sorted.

In the summer holiday between the participants second and third year of study all but one young man did some form of work. Those at the modern university did not normally undertake work that was related to their degree. They tended to work in bars, as labourers, at theme parks and the like. Nathan told me that his summer holiday work was: 'a job as a steward or a job as a... waiter'. Edward commented: 'I don't know it might be at the new place, the bookmakers'. This paid work was an economic necessity for these students. I

asked the young men about doing work in their holidays that may enhance their chances of obtaining future employment in their chosen field. Their stock answer to my question was 'no', even though on further probing some of them did explain that they could perhaps do some work that would enhance their CVs but it was not a major consideration. They were concerned primarily with earning money.

Only Frank did work that would be a helpful addition to his CV. He was also the only student attending a modern university who had been to see the careers advisors on campus. He explained that he had been told by the careers advisor to build up work experience that was relevant to the teaching of P.E. which was the career he aspired to. In visiting the careers advisory centre Frank had tapped into the cultural capital of the careers advisor and this advice he had put to good use. While Frank was the exception among those from the modern universities, those at the elite universities almost always found internships that would be a useful addition to their CVs, as Craig explained:

I will be working in the Department of Transport which is where I've been assigned for 6 to 9 weeks and it is paid because it is a university internship. So it is aimed at students who can't support themselves and it is in London.

Leon, who plans to be an archivist and lives in Northshire, emailed North library advising them that he was studying English, that he would like to do be an archivist and that he was interested in doing an internship at North library. When I asked him why North library he explained: 'I don't have access to

transport, so I don't really have money to travel and so it is the biggest and best local thing of that nature'. He was given an internship at North library.

I asked the young men attending elite universities how they had acquired this knowledge about the need to build up their CVs with internships and work experience. Two extracts are included here as a flavour of the general response I received from them all: 'I suppose a lot of people start talking about it around college and you think oh I better do something about it' (Craig).

You sort of hear about it because in about the first term all the law firms run loads of events up here... and because Michaelmas term is recruitment season and there is a big law fair organised by the careers service for the faculty (Ben).

These young men were in an environment where they 'learn' that there is strong competition for the limited number of professional careers currently available in the UK economy (Brown, 2013) and that there is now a 'hierarchy of credentialised achievement' (p. 685) that needs to be acknowledged (i.e. at least a 2:1) if they are to be considered for one of these highly sought after careers.

The young men attending the elite universities were immersed in a habitus and field that understands the importance of building a CV and doing internships at the appropriate places. These young men's habitus and field have gradually transformed and they now understand that:

As undergraduate degrees become more common, access to employment and further education opportunities

increasingly depend on extra-curricular and 'enriching' educational experiences (Lehmann, 2012, p. 203).

And while they do not have the economic capital that many of their middle class peers enjoy their particular colleges ensure that they are paid when on placements. Those participants in my study attending elite universities have what Brown (2013) refers to as the 'access to capital (financial, cultural, and social)' (p. 695) which is usually reserved for middle class people.

Another difference between the two groups was evident in what they said about their time management skills and approach to study. As in Reay et al's (2009) study, the respondents at the elite universities appeared to be self-disciplined and self-regulated. Adam tells me that this year:

I think I've managed my time better in terms of academic and extra stuff... most people decided to knuckle down a bit this year... this is the grade they are coming out with when they apply for jobs... like you've got to push yourself and I think you've got to know how to manage your time and that kind of thing.

Ian has had to impose limits on the amount of time he spends studying:

So I knew I had to organise my time... so I stopped working at 8pm every day and I haven't worked on Sundays... Yes that is within, at those times I can't, I don't allow myself to do any work. So I go and socialise with people.

Most of the respondents at the modern universities tell me that they need to plan better. The concept of being an 'independent learner' (Read et al, 2003, p. 270) is a shock to these young men. Most of them had qualified to enter university through the BTEC route which they seemed to understand to be an easier option than the more traditional A level route. As David recalls: 'it was kind of easy, you got like quite a lot of help'. Frank also recalls being helped a lot 'if I needed help I'd text him (the teacher) and he'd give me the answers'. These young men were unfamiliar with being left to do their own research, they were not familiar with the traditional 'academic culture' (Read et al, 2003, p. 271) of their university and the lack of support and guidance that seemed to come with it. While Frank does know that: 'university is all about self-learning, all they do is give you the information, you have to go away and research', he does not always plan well enough to do this in an organised manner. It appears as if essays are usually all due at the end of each semester; this often results in some essays being done reasonably well and others being rushed to completion sometimes in a matter of hours, as Frank explained:

I'd like just, I'd rushed it, I didn't even realise I had the deadline and I found out six hours before so I had to do 4,000 words in six hours. I managed to get it done but it got 39.

Edward, who claims he went to virtually no lectures in his first year, tells me:

That is what has held me back a bit you know... I've got to find a balance (between his paid employment/playing football for outside teams/university studies) next year...

well uni is the main thing next year definitely... I've really got to start planning... I talk such a good game, as in I can say I'll plan but I never actually do it... it is a bit weird, I don't understand.

David describes his difficulty: '...you don't do much and then it all kind of comes at once... it gets on top of you... things just mount up and then you get a bit down in the dumps... I just plod on'. Is this lack of self-regulation and self-discipline caused by what Crozier and Reay (2011) refer to as a lack of engagement with their studies? Alternatively, were these young men less able to seek out support or perhaps their BTEC had not provided them with the sort of transferable skills needed for academic essay writing and therefore they were all starting from scratch.

Two of the students at modern universities, reported that they had not really been committed to going on to higher education. Harvey tells me: 'Like it was mainly her (his mother's) idea to come to uni'. When I asked another student, David, why he decided to go to university he recalls:

I remember being quite reluctant at first... but I think, I didn't know what else to do. I didn't have anything else to do and I didn't just want to just sit at home, so I just went I think.

Unlike their peers at the elite universities, the young men attending modern universities did not appear to have such well laid out career plans. David and Edward were not sure that they would use their degrees when they had completed their studies. They both planned to travel.

Others who had originally intended to do a PGCE course after their undergraduate degree were now having second thoughts about their careers like those working class students at university in Canada in Lehmann's (2012) study which found 'that many students revised initial career goals' (p. 214). Some of the students in my study were coming to the realisation that there are limited numbers of places on the PGCE programme and that they may not achieve the results necessary to gain access. Frank, Harvey, Karl, Mark and Nathan had, in their first interviews, all stated that they wanted to be teachers. In the second interview Nathan expressed an interest in being a football coach instead of a teacher and while he did not explain why his career plans had changed he did acknowledge that his marks were not high enough to obtain entrance onto the PGCE course at his current university. Harvey also referred to being a football coach. Again he did not give a reason for his change of mind but his marks would have needed to improve considerably to be eligible to enter the PGCE course. Karl has decided that he would like to go into the production of education materials and Mark, who still wants to be a teacher, stated that: 'by the time I've finished there might be something available to me that is different and suits me more, but a PGCE, I don't think would'. His concern was that he would not be able to cope with the level of work and he also knew he needed to achieve a first in his undergraduate degree and this was not really a realistic expectation at that stage. Frank was still set on becoming a teacher and was hoping to be able to do some 'on the job training' equivalent to the graduate teacher programme (GTP). The young men in my study who had experienced low academic performance and/or failed a particular essay or unit of work dealt

with it in various ways. As explained above, some students changed their career aspirations while others maintained their original aspirations.

Extracurricular activities

All the young men in my study participated in extracurricular activities but there were differences in the nature and location of these. Those at the elite universities only participated in activities within the confines of their university whereas most of those attending the modern universities were involved in activities outside of university. The young men at the elite universities were fully embedded in university life during term time and the extracurricular activities they engaged in took place at university and were not sporting in nature; they were often related to the subjects they were studying.

The only young man at a modern university not participating in extra-curricular sporting activities was Karl, he was also the only young man at a modern university reading Education. He told me that a lot of his spare time was taken up being 'a Scout leader and a Beaver Cubs leader'.

The other young men at modern universities were involved in extracurricular sporting activities: for six this was football and for one it was rugby. Those engaged in extracurricular sporting activities were studying Sports Science at university. These young men had a passion for sport and appeared to have converted their sporting capital into a form of academic capital. They continued to use their sporting prowess in their spare time while engaging in full time academics. These young men appear to maintain a 'foot in both camps' engaged in a sporting-masculinity discourse through their participation in football/rugby while also continuing with their academic studies.

Another difference became apparent between the two groups of men when they were asked why they participated in the activities that they did. All the young men at the modern universities gave only one reason which was that they enjoyed the activity. At the elite universities, some activities were undertaken because they were enjoyed, others were undertaken not only because they were enjoyed but also because they could be used to build up CVs. Ben explained that in the third term of his second year he had become the President of the Bar Society:

which is a society for people with a desire to give information and run events for people who want to go to the bar... a lot of my time this term isn't spent studying it is doing that... it is an extracurricular society but it is legally relevant.

Graham who is studying physics and hopes to go on to do a PhD tells me that he is the Secretary of the Space and Astronomy Society and is its outreach officer. At the Society meetings: 'I get to meet the Head of the Astrophysics Department quite frequently so I am getting PhD points!'

Craig, who was the Junior Common Room (JCR) President in his second year, explained that being JCR President involved:

...lots of meetings, lots of emails but it has also helped me to get other things. This summer I've got an internship coming up in the Civil Service... you have to do a telephone interview and the JCR things always come up,

they were always asking about it, what did you learn from it, what did you take from it, all that kind of stuff.

According to Crozier & Reay (2011), on arrival at elite universities, first generation working class students find that there is clear direction that provides security and clarity. These factors enable first generation working class students to develop stronger learner identities and behaviours that ensure success. The modern universities offer first generation working class students a structure that, according to Crozier & Reay (2011), is loose and intended to be non-threatening and relaxed. In actuality this loose structure can compound the first generation university students' confusion, because of a lack of direction and clarity (Crozier & Reay, 2011).

For the students in my study who attended modern universities the process of acquiring the necessary cultural capital to succeed at university took considerable time. It appeared that this process took longer for them than their counterparts at the elite universities (Crozier & Reay, 2011).

The somewhat discrepant cases

In my analysis of the second interviews I found that three students' experiences were significantly different from their peers at the same type of university thus, I described them as discrepant cases: Frank is at a modern university and immersed in life at university; he has had a pronounced 'identity transformation' (Byrom & Lightfoot, 2012, p. 126). John is at an elite university and he is the only one in my cohort at elite universities who has not adapted very well to life at university. David is at a modern university and the only

student across the spectrum unconvinced that being at university is a worthwhile activity.

The only student at a modern university who appears to have *immersed* himself completely in university life is Frank. Frank appears to have characteristics similar to those students in my study attending the elite universities and those in the Reay et al (2009) study on working class young people at an elite university. Frank has remained in halls while undertaking his degree. In his second and third year he took on the role of Senior Resident in his halls. He also stayed in halls in the summer holiday between his second and third year of study and he worked at a locally based club that taught sports to young children. The extra-curricular activities he participated in: rugby, badminton and drama, were all university based clubs. The question is why did Frank so fully embrace life away from home when most of his fellow white working class males remained more attached to home? Frank was brought up by his mother and has had little contact with his father who is a taxi driver. He has an older sister who works at a fast food outlet and a brother who works in a hotel, and they are both some 10 years older than he is. His mother, he tells me, is a manager at a supermarket local to home and 'I mean my Mum earns what £12,000 a year before tax and my brother earns £13,000'. Home is a town in Southshire and his brother and sister still live at home. He goes on to explain that his mother:

...has mollycoddled us, which is why I don't think my
brother and sister have left home... I don't know but like I
have been the first to say I don't want to be stuck here, I

don't want to be living here when I am 30 years old. I
want to go and do something, I want to go and be a
teacher.

Both of Frank's siblings 'bunked off school... but to me education has always been important, always been important'. Frank is a very self-motivated young man. He recalls that his mother would have preferred it if he had gone to a university closer to home but he chose his university he is currently studying at 'because it is far enough away but I can still come back'. His mother called him every day in Fresher's Week to ask him if he was having any problems. It appears as if Frank's mother was having separation problems. Frank also explained that most of the young people he was at school and sixth form college with:

...weren't ready (to move away from home) they like their
home comforts... don't get me wrong I love living at home
but I am just so glad I came to university... so far, yes, it
has been the best two years of my life.

From the quote above it would seem that Frank did not want to appear to be negative about 'home' but he felt the need to break with tradition and leave his home town. He has certainly exhibited some of those characteristics that were displayed by the successful working class young people attending an elite university in the Reay et al. (2009) study. These were: 'almost superhuman levels of motivation, resilience and determination' (p. 1115). When I asked Frank if anyone in particular had encouraged him to do well academically he told me that he had wanted to be a teacher since:

... I was five, six years old when I.... thought I want to do what they do. I want to help. I love it, I have always loved teaching, I have always loved that feeling you get when you know that someone understands something because of you.

He explained that his mother 'is very supportive of that and like yes she has always been there when I've needed her'. Later in the interview he explains: 'Yes, mum was very, very big on reading... she would always make time for me to read'. He mentioned his older brother being a replacement father figure for him and he also refers to a teacher in primary school: 'she was a big influence, like whenever I had any problems I would go and see her... I'm still in contact with (her)...'. As explained in the previous chapter, Frank went through a period in the first two years of secondary school when he was anything but the ideal student and a male teacher at Frank's secondary school suggested that if he wanted to get ahead he would have to change his behaviour. Through these two contacts Frank has accumulated the cultural capital necessary to set him apart from most of his peers in his home town.

Frank is like those working class students at an elite university in Reay et al.'s (2009) study: extremely determined, single minded and passionate (in this case) about teaching. Failing some essays had not caused him to veer from his initial career aspirations. As mentioned above, Frank was the only young man interviewed at the modern universities who has been to the careers service provided by the university. He does not want to do the PGCE because of the cost, but he remains optimistic that he will obtain a teaching position and then do his teaching qualification while in post. While he does not exhibit the 'highly

developed academic dispositions' that those in Reay et al.'s (2009, p. 1115) study do, he has fully embraced university life.

John was the only participant in my study attending an elite university who had problems adjusting to university life. He told me that he had never had to work while at school or at the sixth form college. He would turn up at school on the day of exams 'and get an A without revising or anything. So I guess I was just lucky in that I could just turn up and not feel pressure in exams and do well'. He went on to explain that he:

...thought the hard bit of coming here would be that I was going to be one of the smart people here sort of thing but it is more a case of it doesn't really matter how smart you are, you have to work incredibly hard...

John, like the other students in my study, did not know what to expect on arrival at university as a first generation university student but unlike the other students in my study attending elite universities he has not adapted as well to the new field.

He goes on to explain that in his first year he struggled: (I) 'slated myself quite a lot last year, just focussing on work, I really struggled with the social side of things down here'. His second year has not been much better for him '...my social life... is non-existent... I haven't really gotten on with anybody since I've come...' Perhaps because he has not socialized with other students he has been foundering like 'a fish out of water' (Bourdieu, 1999). He has not become socially comfortable and has not acclimatised to the institutional habitus of the university.

John has not come to terms with the fact that he is not the 'best'. He now has a very 'fragile learner identity' (Reay et al., 2010) and he has also not really learned to cope with the workload or the methods of teaching at his university. As he explains:

...the work's really quite intense a lot of the time. I don't prepare myself very well... the way they teach is kind of de-motivating compared to what we are used to, in the sense we don't seem to get taught until after we do our work, which always gets to me, that way round...

John appears to be adapting very slowly to the institutional habitus of his elite university, his subject discipline and the 'renegotiating of his identity' (Baxter & Britton, 2001). As he puts it '...it is just I think I am not easily helped'. Perhaps dominant masculine discourses that encourage men to see seeking help as feminine have stopped John from seeking the help that he refers to in the quote (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). When I asked him to describe his second year, his response was: 'A lot of hard work really. Sort of prepare, get all the work done and go home and sleep'. He had no plans for the summer: 'I started to look for some work but I think I left it too late. I'll probably just try and consolidate work and work on getting back to happy again, that sort of thing'. John does not show the self-regulation and self-discipline the other young men at the elite universities displayed. He appears to spend most of his time studying, he has not found a balance, and his learner identity has not recovered from 'not being the best' and it is still fragile. He explained that he was trying to get a first.

As suggested earlier, John's adaption to the institutional habitus of the university has been slower than the other young men I interviewed. He claims to have adjusted '...I am used to kind of working all the time now'. But he then goes on to say:

I have a bit of a fear of not like reaching my potential, it feels like an horrific waste if I don't do at least as close to as well as I could do... If I end up flunking out of university and not making it my prospects suddenly shoot down massively... I never seem to live up to my potential and in terms of my general life, I'm pretty... I'm not in a great place at the moment... I am just hoping that being here is going to give me a leg up in the future.

John still appears to be in the early stages of 'habitus transformation' (Byrom & Lightfoot, 2013, p. 821).

At this stage in their academic careers only one of the young men, David, who is at a modern university, suggested that if he had his time again he would not go to university. He recalls that he just drifted into coming to university because he had nothing else to do:

If I had known then what I know now, I wouldn't have come... I know what I could achieve without going (to university) but at the time I didn't, I wasn't really fully developed in the head, I don't think I'd really had figured out everything, what I knew about myself...

David explains that in his opinion you don't learn anything of value at university. He has obviously had this conversation with his father because he then goes on to say:

...what my Dad says (is) you question things because on your course you are constantly questioning, so he says you question things and that is what it (university) teaches you to do, that sort of stuff, but I don't know if I would have... I don't know if I'd be the same person now but...

David's older brother had left school before he had taken his GCSEs and this brother appears to have influenced his thoughts:

he (his older brother) didn't want to become a wage slave and stuff like that and just, he just, he's done some pretty cool things... People would look down on him in society because, he just... drifts about from here to there but really he is seeing new things, experiencing different cultures and things like that. It is really a good life and a bad life.

David is facing a conundrum because he knows he has changed, as was mentioned earlier in this chapter, but has this change occurred because he is attending university or would he have changed anyway? Is David, perhaps because of a loyalty to his brother, trying to 'cope with discontinuities between former and newly acquired aspects of self' (Aries & Seider, 2005, p. 435)? Is he having difficulty justifying these new 'aspects of self' that have developed while

attending university? Bryom & Lightfoot (2012) suggest that this dislocation occurs when a student has not been fully able to align his 'primary habitus with that of the institution' (p. 131).

Discussion

This chapter has explored what my cohort of young men from a working class background have to say about their experiences at university. Their accounts have been critically considered in the main sections of this chapter. However, now I want to raise some issues that need a little more consideration and that relate to three focal matters; my theoretical framework of Bourdieusian analysis, the influence of cultures of masculinity and some complexities that arise because of the sample construction, specifically the higher education institutions where the young men in my study were registered as students.

First, I want to return to the notion of habitus in relation to the individuals in my study and then in relation to the culture of their HEIs. As I have reported, it was obvious to me from the outset of the second interview, that my cohort were far more assured and confident than they had been in the first meeting. From what they said, it seemed that for the most part they had settled in their university lives and were more like 'fish in water' (Bourdieu, 1990a) and had adapted to their university's culture. It was evident from what they said, and how they said it, that this shift included changes in their linguistic codes and cultural and academic capital. The young men were, in the main, enthusiastic about their university experiences and seemed to be able to move seamlessly between the habitus of their family and their university although they sometimes made some accommodations in their families lives in order to ease

this shift. My findings resonate with what Reay et al, concluded in relation to their cohort of nine working class students at elite universities and their comments are worth including at this point:

they displayed the ability to successfully move across two very different fields, combining strong connections and loyalties to family and home friends with what are seen to be classically middle-class academic dispositions, a versatility that most had begun to develop in early schooling. This we suggest is because these students had already begun to engage in processes of self-conscious reflexivity (McNay, 2008) in which self-awareness and a propensity for self-improvement become incorporated into the habitus (2009, p. 1105).

What emerged strongly from my coding and analysis of the transcripts was that the cohort reported some significant differences in the habitus of the universities that they attended; differences between what Reay et al (2009) conceptualise as the 'institutional habitus' of HE providers. Reay, et al. (2009) claim that these differences in habitus result in students having a range of different experiences depending on university type. Again, from the narratives of my participants, it did seem that there were differences between what I have termed the 'elite' providers and the 'modern' providers as I have detailed in this chapter. Not surprisingly, the 'elite' providers had more resources at their disposal (Scott, 1993) and were able to offer a great deal of support to their working class undergraduates. Also, not surprisingly given their heritage and

tradition and reputation, they were well networked into post-graduate professional occupational destinations (Power, 2000).

From what my cohort reported, not only were their differences between the institutional habituses of different types of university (elite and modern), there were also difference in institutional habituses between similar universities (the two modern providers in my sample). The two modern universities that were attended by my participants differed in terms of the teaching and support for learning that was on offer. They also differed in terms of the ways in which they seemed to offer an inclusive caring environment (in some ways similar to that offered in the elite colleges in my study) or a more detached almost part-time approach towards their student cohorts. The point is that institutional habitus is a complex phenomenon and cannot easily be reduced to a simple binary such as might be suggested by a contrast between elite and modern HEIs.

The second theoretical lens that I selected in order to explore the experiences of my cohort was that of dominant cultures of masculinity and the influences that aspects of these may or may not have played in the academic progress of the young men in my study. As I have discussed in this chapter, some of my sample, particularly but not only those at the elite HEIs (for example Karl) did not report any dissonances in this arena. For example, while some of those who now attended elite universities had been somewhat marginalised in their earlier school settings (key stage three and four phases) for being 'geeks' and not being sporty, now they were able to make friends, become influential and take up mainstream positions (although John was an outlier here).

As I have also argued in this chapter, those young men who attended modern universities and were studying Sports Sciences had been able to draw on their earlier cultures of masculinity in order to perform their emergent identities of young graduates. In terms of my wider discussion, here I would like to stress the ways that dominant versions of masculinities may not be as fixed and immutable as may sometimes be imagined. As Brown (2009, p. 122) points out, masculinities are: 'a varying product of historical and cultural processes. In this formulation of the issue, masculinity can take different forms, depending on the circumstances'.

The versions of masculinities that are on offer as resources for identity construction in HEIs may be more complex, more emotionally versatile and may offer a challenge to some of the more limited versions that exist. Indeed, Gee (2014) talks of what she refers to as 'flexible masculinities' and her case is that role models like David Beckham 'bend the codes' of masculinity – even in relation to sports (p. 917). However, she makes the point that even so, Beckham represents a white, heterosexual portrayal of this flexible masculinity. In contrast however, Clayton and Harris (2008) did find that older forms of what Connell (2005) calls 'hegemonic masculinities' are perpetuated in the bars and sports-based peer groupings in HEIs. I cannot say to what extent this was the case with my sample as no-one discussed this aspect of university socialising.

The last matter I need to discuss in relation to this chapter is the matter of sampling. Here I want to return to the tensions involved in the fact that the men I interviewed came from two 'types' of university that I categorised somewhat crudely as being either elite or modern. It could be argued that had my sample

been drawn from respondents from say a redbrick or provincial university, I may well have found more overlaps between the 'institutional habitus' of HEI providers. Some providers may well be offering as much support as the elite universities in my study. For example, if I had included FE providers of HE in my study there may have been more support with academic writing and study skills. While I fully acknowledge the very real limitations that are caused by my sample only studying at a limited (and somewhat polarised) set of institutions, I was interested in the individual's experience and the factors that led to their success rather than the experiences of groups of young men at different types of university. Curry, Nembhard & Bradley explain that the aim of purposeful sampling is to 'identify "information-rich" participants who have certain characteristics, detailed knowledge or direct experience relevant to the phenomenon of interest' (2009, p, 1445), and, while there are limitations with my sample, 'it is important to emphasise that the issue is not one of dealing with a distorted or biased sample, but rather one of clearly delineating the purpose and limitation of the sample studied (Patton, 2002, p. 563). This is a matter to which I return in the final chapter.

Chapter Six

A Degree...What Now ?

Academic Achievements and Career Prospects

...so if I don't get accepted for the astronaut programme then...I plan to go on and do a PhD in research, Graham (a study participant).

...job wise I think it'll probably just be something to get by...a teaching assistant...like I haven't really started something, David (a study participant).

Introduction

In this chapter I explore how the participants in my study negotiated their way through their third year of undergraduate study; their career ambitions and what inroads they had made towards achieving these ambitions. I also consider how all the young men in my study perceived university life, the benefits as well as the costs of obtaining a degree and any changes they and/or others may have noticed in themselves. Finally I examine possible reasons for the withdrawal of two students in the cohort who originally agreed to be interviewed by me set alongside the national context of withdrawal rates.

I draw on data obtained from my analysis of the final set of in-depth interviews I conducted with thirteen of the original fifteen young men I had recruited for my study. I undertook these last interviews in the spring of 2014, when the young men were in the last half of their third, and in many cases, final year of study.

Table 6:1 acts as an aide memoire to show the type of university each participant attended, their proposed educational qualifications and their career ambitions.

Table 6:1 Name, type of university, higher education qualification career ambitions

Name	Type of University	Proposed Further Qualification	Career Ambitions	Anticipated Degree Class
Adam	Elite	Masters	Engineering Consultancy	2:1
Ben	Elite	Postgraduate	Solicitor	2:1
Craig	Elite	Teach First	History Teacher	First/2:1
Graham	Elite	Undecided	Astronaut or PhD	First
Ian	Elite	Undecided	Computer Programming Consultancy or Postgraduate Study (Masters)	First
John	Elite	Undergraduate degree	Undecided possibly Civil Service or Consultancy	First
Leon	Elite	Masters	Librarian	First
David	Modern	Undergraduate degree	Football Coaching	2:2
Edward	Modern	Undergraduate degree	Football Coaching	2:2
Frank	Modern	PGCE	Physical Education Teacher	2:1
Harvey	Modern	Undergraduate degree	Football Coaching or Physical Education Teaching	2:1/2:2
Karl	Modern	Masters	Education Section of a Museum	First
Mark	Modern	PGCE	Physical Education Teaching	First
Nathan	Modern	Dropped out in third year	Unknown	N/A
Oliver	Modern	Dropped out in second year	Unknown	N/A

Initial impressions

My initial perceptions on meeting each of these young men for the third time was that they had grown in self-confidence since our first meeting and were all more assertive and confident. It did not matter which university they were attending, what class of degree they were hoping to achieve or how advanced they were with their plans for the following year. They were very engaged with the interview process. All these interviews were longer than the previous ones I had conducted. Whilst the previous interviews had varied in length from thirty five minutes to an hour and fifteen minutes, most of these third interviews were an hour and fifteen minutes long with some lasting two hours and many young men enthusiastically suggesting we could meet for another interview next year. These young men appeared to be very open and frank throughout the third interview and some had well thought out future plans.

A degree... almost...

The young men attending the elite universities were very focussed on their studies when I conducted the third and final interview as they were all facing the prospect of upcoming exams. They all appeared confident of passing their exams and, for most of them, the main concern was over whether they would be getting a First or Upper Second degree. Graham (physics) and Adam (engineering) were both undertaking four year courses but nonetheless had exams to prepare for. Of the others, Ben was: 'hoping that I'll get a high 2:1', Ian was 'aiming for a first this year', Leon too said: 'I think I could get a first', as did John: 'I am still aiming for a first which I think is entirely do-able'. Craig explained that his tutors were telling him to:

go for firsts, go for firsts and it is like of course I'm going to try but there is no mark scheme, no one tells you how to get a first, there is no mark scheme, there is no indication on how to get a first... I don't even know, no one knows what gets a first... I genuinely don't know how to do it and it is pure luck as far as I can see when I've written a good essay and when I've written a bad essay.

Craig was very frustrated with what he saw as the lack of transparency in the college assessment system and was adamant that if he did get a first it would be due more to luck than hard work.

The young men at the modern universities did not have exams to prepare for but each young man had a thesis to write as well as an essay for each unit of study being undertaken in their current semester. When they were asked what mark they thought they would attain, Edward, David and Harvey said they were aiming for and hopeful of attaining a 2:2. However, Mark thought that 'if I get to grips with my dissertation, the other subjects I'm quite competent in and confident about so I could go towards a low first if I put my head to it', and Karl suggested that 'I won't get any lower than a 2:2 but I'm hoping for a 2:1', Frank too was hoping for a 2:1 as this is what he needed to be considered for the PGCE programme. These young men have come to know the academic field and habitus, they understand that while 'credentials are the currency of opportunity' (Brown, 2003, p. 142) a third class degree is no longer sufficient. They require a second class degree as a minimum, and, eight of the young men were considering the possibility of continuing their education beyond this undergraduate degree (see Table 6:1).

They were (at the time of the last interview) very close to obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree but it was not plain sailing for these young men. Frank had 'split' his third year. This meant that he would take two years to complete his third year of study and would now not graduate till July 2015. David was, at the time of this interview, yet to obtain ethical approval for his dissertation research; he also claimed that he had yet to begin any work on his dissertation which was due four weeks after our interview. He went on to say that he had also not done any work towards the essays and folios due in the following month. He told me that:

So yeah I'm struggling a bit... it's a bit stressful because I just feel guilty because I haven't done it and that but it will be disappointing if I've got this far and then I mess it up yeah...

When I asked him why this had occurred his response was: 'I don't know why it's so bad this semester, probably because I haven't really gone in (to university) so I haven't got into the swing of things...' On further questioning it transpired that David had met a young woman a few months previously and was spending a lot of time with her. He was not at all confident that he would meet his deadlines and graduate. David was in a precarious position, facing academic failure, something both he and his parents are keen for him to avoid. This has resulted in David 'kind of feeling guilty' because he feels he is letting his parents down if he does not graduate. As Leathwood & O'Connell (2003) found, for many students in their study of 'non-traditional' students at a modern university, 'the experience was one of struggle against the odds' (p. 607).

Several of the young men in my study certainly found the road to obtaining a BA littered with obstacles even, as David discovered, at the last hurdle there is 'a risk... one thing or the other, it's like two paths'.

The changes undergone...

When the young men were asked if they had changed during their three years at university they all believed that they had. Only one participant, John, expressed the change negatively:

I think I am a lot *less* confident now as a result... I mean in terms of my work, I mean the Oxbridge system seems to be based around doing the work then being told, them telling you why you are wrong, as opposed to teaching you and then trying. So I find it very difficult... it feels that at all times you are constantly under achieving.

This is a young man in line to achieve a first class degree but he has experienced some emotional problems along the way and socially still does not feel he fits in:

...like I don't have the common experiences, I don't even know the same sort of shops and I'm not as comfortable in coffee shops (as the other students at his elite university) and things like that.

John felt very isolated in the university environment and after three years at an elite university he still felt 'like a fish out of water'. John remains, in his own eyes, a 'cultural outsider' (Granfield, 1991, p. 33). In a similar vein to those working class students attending elite universities in Granfield's (1991) study,

John felt out of place because he lacked the values and experiences his middle class counterparts had. This is a case of habitus and social field not matching. When this occurs the individual experiences conflict (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). John will leave university with this conflict unresolved. After three years at university he has experienced significant academic success but he appears to have what Ryan & Sackrey, (1984) describe as a 'stranger in paradise' syndrome when they referred to the experiences of those working class individuals who felt like outsiders in a middle class environment.

One other young man studying at a modern university, Karl, replied: 'Not massively' when he was asked if he had changed. Later on in the interview he acknowledged that:

...it's opened me up to quite a few other options that I can do because originally I did come in looking to do teaching and decided against that. Yes, so it has helped me to see there are other things available.

Karl lived at home and he suggested that this may have been the reason why he had not changed that much as he was still predominantly mixing with his home friends. He went on to say that had he lived on campus:

...my social life would probably be slightly different, because I would be going places which would be more campus orientated and stuff like that. Probably would've met a fair more number of people as well.

Clayton, Crozier & Reay (2009) suggest that, by living at home, some working

class students avoid the social milieu of university thereby minimising their social anxieties. This may well have been the case with Karl because he had very limited social contact at university, only attending lectures. He had taken part in virtually no social events in his three years at university and had not involved himself with any clubs or societies. In fact, Karl could not even tell me what anyone else on his course was planning to do career-wise. He appeared to have had minimum levels of engagement with the field of higher education. Similarly to some of the students who lived at home in Holdsworth's (2006) study on student's residential status, Karl did not feel the need or perhaps did not want to fit in to university life, retaining his home-based friendships throughout his three years at university. Attending university, for Karl, was almost no different from going to college and it did not seem to occur to him that he could participate in non-academic activities at university. Karl had a 'functional relationship to university' (Holdsworth, 2006, p. 508) with university being seen as a means to an end, the end being an undergraduate degree.

All the other young men considered that they had changed quite significantly. They appeared to have been able to adapt their habituses. Adaptation occurs when 'individuals confront events that cause self-questioning, whereupon the habitus begins to operate at the level of consciousness and the person develops new facets of the self' (Reay, 2004, p.437-438). This change or adaptation had been noticed by family and friends. Harvey, who attends a modern university explained that his vocabulary had changed: 'I would say that I've got quite a broad range vocabulary and people at home they just don't know what it means and I'm like sorry I forgot...' Ian, who attended an elite university, suggested that:

...when I go back home I have to change how I speak definitely because I have a much posher accent here than I do at home. And I get told off by my family a lot if I don't... also the tone of the conversation changes a lot. Like I have to change a lot of vocabulary and the actual subject of things.

The cultural and social capital that Ian and Harvey had acquired while at university had changed their relationships with their families. As explored in Chapter Five, they, like many of the young men I interviewed, found themselves having to adopt two different identities; a working class identity at home which includes a certain accent, vocabulary and subject matter, and a more middle class educated identity at university. However, most of the young men who participated in my study had in general:

displayed the ability to successfully move across two very different fields, combining strong connections and loyalties to family and friends with what are seen to be classically middle-class academic dispositions (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1105).

This was particularly apparent for the young men attending elite universities (except John) though most of the young men in my study found some disjuncture between fields. Edward tells me '...I've matured in the last three years without a shadow of a doubt... it's nice to hear my parents and my friends say but I know in myself I have changed as a person so... I am quite glad'. All the young men have to a greater or lesser degree taken 'on a new language of

academia' (Baxter and Britton, 2001, p. 93).

Craig, who had attended an elite university, explained what university had done for him:

...of course university opens up a wide range of ideas and people and that leads you in a very different direction... we have very in depth discussion and that is what I like. You know I'm an academic and an intellectual at heart and I think I would find it very, very difficult to engage back. I have tried but you are just operating on two levels and it is horrible... you just move in totally different spheres and it is a horrible, horrible concept to think.

Craig was feeling guilty as he reflected on and tried to come to terms with leaving his old world behind to some extent. He believed that the changes he had undergone at university had led to some differences in ideological beliefs between himself and his family: '...my parents can look at me like 'what are you on about?'... maybe being at university has made me a little more left wing... and so we come in conflict'.

Craig felt the changes acutely and while he was very positive about how he had changed, and what he referred to himself as, 'the cultural capital' he had accumulated, he also understood that his university experience had caused a divide between himself, his family and home friends. He had not come to terms with simultaneously inhabiting 'different and conflicting worlds: the world of working class life compared with the newly developing educated world associated with the middle-class' (Baxter & Britton, 2001, p. 97). Craig appeared

to be experiencing a dislocation between his old habitus and his newly developed habitus and with this can come some anxiety and guilt (Baxter & Britton, 2001). Craig explained: 'you do not have the social capital (in a working class family)... I do think it is a social and cultural thing'.

The *perceived* costs and the benefits of a university degree

Costs

The young men I interviewed were all asked if they thought there had been any costs to them in coming to university in emotional, social and economic terms.

Ian's response was:

I don't really feel that I that I have lost anything by coming here. I can't imagine, maybe there would have been some people who would have preferred me before I had gone to uni, just in the sense that I talk slightly different now and my humour is going to be different. I don't feel I've noticed any potential loss.

Several other young men, like Ian, felt that there had been no costs to them, in going to university; they included Edward, Karl, Ben and Graham. Some of the young men felt there were minimal costs: David saw the costs in terms of financial and social loss: 'not seeing old friends'. Mark had similar thoughts:

Well financially I think there's been a lot... I don't tend to see my friends a lot now. I don't keep in contact as much as I used to because it's hard when you are in London and they're all in (names home town) you feel a little bit left out...

Harvey also thought of costs mainly in social terms including the probability of losing home friends. Adam expressed the costs in emotional terms:

I guess when I talk to people from home or something
you'll quite often get like a negative connotation for being
at Oxbridge. Everyone's like 'ah you're at Oxbridge' ... I
didn't like telling people that I was even here...

Craig described the costs to himself in terms of moving in a completely different sphere from those at home. He explained that his mother seemed intimidated by the prospect of meeting people from the university Craig attended, as he said:

She feels threatened by it, so whenever she comes up here
we won't meet in college, it is always outside, she won't
mix with anyone else. So it is interesting and it is a point
where two worlds collide almost.

Leon was vague about the costs: '...there have been costs in that there have been sort of day to day costs but I think no, I think on a wider level there haven't been'.

John expressed the costs in terms of having chosen an elite university in which to study. He had, and continues to have, health problems which have meant that he has not mixed on a social level with the other students; this has resulted in him not making any friends at university. John has not participated in any of the extracurricular activities on offer choosing instead to concentrate solely on his academic work. In a similar manner to Craig, John found the method of teaching frustrated him and after three years at university he still wrestled with it:

It's a lot more work than other places judging by what my friends do (at other universities). It is quite frustrating the way they teach you, it's probably going to knock your confidence but intentionally. It feels intentional. I mean why would you structure the work load to make you wrong and *then* tell you *why* you are wrong? You know there will be specific problems that they give us where it's literally no way we can figure it out because it's not in any text book, it's not in lectures, it's some trick they want us to figure out by ourselves... and then you go to class... and everyone will be wrong and then they will tell you why you are wrong...

As explained previously, John was, after three years at an elite university, still feeling like a fish out of water. He appeared to be experiencing acute frustration, confusion and anxiety, something that Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel (2005) refer to as 'learning shock' (p. 276). He does not seem to have been able to accrue and employ legitimate and dominant forms of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986); his university experience seems to have been defined by the struggles he has faced throughout his three year tenure. As discussed in the previous chapter, the struggles faced by John centre around his lack of social interaction with other students, his lack of confidence in his academic ability and his frustration at the teaching methods employed by the academics at his elite institution.

The central theme that came through the narratives of the young men who felt

there had been costs associated with coming to university was one of social disjuncture, the fear of losing contact with family and friends. The changes these young men had undergone at university could be expressed in terms of social mobility which had resulted in them having to change such things as how they expressed themselves when they were with family and old friends. In spite of these changes and conflicts, however, all the young men in my study had maintained strong links with their families.

Benefits

Many of the young men who were attending elite universities understood the benefits in terms of career advantages, though not all did, as Ian explained:

...it is not so much the academics but where will I be able to, on a Saturday, go and play some ultimate Frisbee and then on Sunday go and play Quidditch and then on Monday just go dancing. It is not realistic to do that anywhere else.

He goes on to explain that at university you mix with a broad range of people and

...the subjects of conversation are so different it just changes how you see everything because before everything was in what felt like a smaller, much smaller bubble than what there is here.

Craig felt that:

...university is empowering for someone like me because it has confirmed and expanded what I always thought was

possible. Absolutely more than anything I have learnt here is empowerment. Really, *real* sense of empowerment. You can do anything, you can be anyone but it gives you in a way, like nothing else can, like I say, the contacts, the people and the things you pick up here and everywhere, you pick up tiny things when you mention something, someone will know someone and this is what you don't have, this is what is the biggest problem for me, is that you do not have, the social capital, if you don't come to somewhere like this.

Adam could see all kinds of benefits from attending an elite university:

You're pushed a lot... I think you develop skills that you wouldn't develop elsewhere because you are under... immense time pressure there's a lot you have got to do... The opportunities just from being here are great, like there are so many events, so many things to get involved with that you can always find new things to do... you always find new people to chat to... and it basically is a massive networking opportunity.

These young men understood the advantages of attending an elite university not only in academic terms but also in social terms and they had managed any disjuncture between habitus and field. As with the working class participants in Reay et al's study, my participants reflected the following perspective: 'Their combination of highly developed academic dispositions and reflexive habituses

generated opportunities and academic success' (2009. p. 1115).

The young men attending the modern universities while generally not as effusive about the benefits of going to university were nevertheless positive about the benefits a university degree confers. Harvey explained that:

I've become more independent, which is always a good thing... I see myself getting a better job than what they've (his friends) got, let me put it that way, and, I think they know that as well that's why they know I've gone to uni and stuff. So I just feel like coming to uni has made like, made me more intelligent than I already was so I can get a better job like when you go for a job interview saying I've got a degree.

Harvey went on to explain that having a degree would enable him to have a career such as P.E. teaching or football coaching which he would enjoy whereas his friends are in jobs they do not enjoy. Karl saw that university had, for him, opened up options that he had not considered prior to going to university.

Edward felt that university had broadened his horizons: '...going to uni helps you because (you meet) people who go travelling... and you talk to more people... I want to explore the planet and explore all these different things...'

Mark saw the benefits of university in employment terms: '...I've got more chance of getting a successful job... you can't do anything without qualifications unless you want to be a labourer or something like that'. David described the benefits of going to university in personal terms: '...it's more of a transition from then to now just on the way I see things... just feel more

confident in myself'.

Frank was the only young man attending a modern university who has remained in university accommodation for the entire time he has been at university and he was very effusive about the benefits of attending university:

University brings this whole new thing... you experience different things, you experience different people, you come out of your comfort zone... made me more understanding of other people...

Frank went on to explain that he had become friendly not only with fellow students but with members of staff as well '...because it can help, it really can, it can open doors to opportunities that might not be there for other people'. He has taken the opportunities offered at university to acquire and develop an understanding of the benefits of connections in this competitive world of career building. He now appears to have the cultural and social capital to 'get on' (Crozier et al., 2008, p. 168).

All the young men, even those who were not sure about where they were heading, wanted different outcomes to their parents. They had all come to university to secure employment in higher status jobs/careers than their parents. The transformation of their working class habitus through education was seen by the participants and their parents as the route to what they perceived as better employment prospects.

Future plans and career ambitions

All but one of the young men who had attended the modern universities had either come through a BTEC route or an access course, whereas all those at the

elite universities had A level qualifications. The young men at the modern universities were in the process of completing more career specific degrees than those at the elite universities and this has resulted in very different occupational choices being made by the young men. All the young men at the elite universities were focussed on pursuing their career choices immediately on completing their degrees or postgraduate degrees and to this end had, in most cases, secured employment before they had completed their studies. On the other hand, of the young men attending the modern universities, only one appeared to have applied for any form of employment and none had, at the time of the last interview, secured employment. In the remainder of this section I will explore the future plans and career ambitions of the young men.

Modern universities and career opportunities

Karl was the only participant to have studied Education. He thought that he would obtain a 2:1 in his Education degree and he had a very clear picture of the career he wished to pursue - to work in the educational section of a museum - but at the time of our last interview (the spring of 2014) he had yet to apply for any positions though he confidently explained that he was planning 'to start applying in the next couple of months'. When Karl was asked what he would do if he did not get a job in his chosen field he responded: 'I guess I will do what most people do, just sign on and keep trying'. Karl further explained that as he saw it '...the problem with the job market, everyone (employers) wants experience but there's no one giving experience'. He was volunteering part-time in a charity shop in order to gain retail experience in the hope that this would increase his job prospects. Karl did not appear troubled by a potential lack of employment and appeared to have a plan of sorts. He also planned to continue

to live at home.

All the other young men attending modern universities were studying Sports Science. Frank had split the third year of his degree, as previously explained, so was planning to go back to university to complete his third year in the academic year 2014/15. He had chosen to do this on the recommendation of his tutors and the careers advice department at his university as he was very keen to do a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The advice he received was to take two years to complete his third year and build up his CV in the academic year 2014/15. It was suggested to Frank that the building up of his CV would improve his chances of obtaining a place on a PGCE course for 2015/16. He was hoping to do this at the university he was currently attending.

Four of the young men attending modern universities had expressed a desire to travel and this had not always been met with enthusiasm by their parents. Mark had been offered a teaching assistant (TA) position at his former secondary school. When I questioned why he had not accepted the position he responded: 'Well it's just I would like to go travelling'. Mark's parents were very keen for him to accept the TA position and suggested that he travel in the summer and take the TA job which began in the September following graduation. Beyond this Mark was keen to pursue a teaching career and would like to do a PGCE sometime in the future. At the time of the final interview Mark had yet to definitely decide on any plans beyond university although he was planning to live at home.

David also had plans to travel after completing his Sports Science degree as he explained 'I just want to relax for the next kind of few years after Uni, do a bit of

travel'. He did go on to say that he had been offered a part time coaching position for a year at one of the schools in which he had been on placement but, like Mark, had not taken up the offer at the time of the last interview. David was planning to live in a flat with some school friends who were also completing their studies at university. When I enquired of Edward what his plans were post-university, he responded:

I tell you what I'm going to do for at least two weeks, from two weeks to a month, there's a game called Football Manager, a PC game... so on the day I finish, April 28th I will have that game and I will not be leaving my house for two weeks...

He then went on to add 'I want to travel as well as do football coaching'. Edward appeared to be the only young man at a modern university who had actually sent off his CV to any organisation.

...I've applied for and sent CV's off for a lot of jobs across the world really, like abroad, to America and Asia and South America and stuff and a few obviously in the UK. But I mean I have no idea where I would, I probably should have my next job in the UK just so I can save up, because obviously I want to go travelling ... but I wouldn't rule out anything, if there was a job turned up in Dubai for instance or South Korea I wouldn't turn it down.

Edward planned to continue to live at home and he, like Mark and David, had a part time fall-back job if other employment fails to materialise:

...the coaching job I was doing before Christmas, he (Edward's employer) said, 'when you finish your degree you can have it back' kind of thing so that's nice to hear and the pay's good and it's a sporty job.

Harvey, like Mark, was feeling the pressure from his parents:

...like they keep harassing me and they're like what you going to do and my Mum's like let's talk about it. I need to pass uni first, I need to focus on that and then I don't know. I said to them last year that I want to go to like America or Australia and do some football coaching there... like there's plenty of websites that I've looked into and that and it's just like moving away for like six months... I don't know if my Mum would let me move for six months.

Harvey had the offer of a coaching job with the Arsenal soccer schools which he could do in the summer holidays if he wished and, when pushed about what his plans were longer term, he responded with:

Come September I'm not really sure... I think I'm just taking it as it comes. I'm not one of them people to plan that far ahead. Like, if something comes up then yeah that's what I would do but if nothing does come up then I think I will start looking around maybe for more coaching jobs like maybe like fulltime coaching jobs rather than just term time. Or maybe Arsenal, ask Arsenal whether I can, if they've got more hours to work fulltime, maybe I can be

pushed up into that bracket or something ... but that will be the sort of time where I'd have to just decide whether I could pursue football coaching as a career or whether I should start setting up my personal statement for the PCGE for the following year and then go for interviews if I get accepted and stuff like that. But I think that's the sort of two avenues that I'm going down, either teaching or coaching because I think that's the two most things that I'd enjoy.

The young men who are completing their Sports Science degree this academic year are leaving academia at least in the short term, and, while their longer term plans do not seem well formulated at this stage, they do all have jobs, albeit part time ones, to fall back on in the short term. The degrees that they chose have led to the type of work they plan to undertake. These young men have retained close links to their homes and localities, and like the participants in the Archer et al, (2010) study, the local neighbourhood and family is very important to them.

Career ambitions for the young men who have studied sport at university are very much football focussed. Many of these young men still played football at university and/or for clubs outside of the university, usually near their family home. One young man plays football semi-professionally. These young men have perhaps earned what Bourdieu (1978) refers to as 'physical capital'. Their love of, and ability to play football/rugby influenced their choice to study a BTEC in Sport in the sixth form. They did well in these studies and obtained

entrance into university to study Sports Science. They achieved academic success by channelling this 'physical capital' into 'academic capital'. They are now aiming to convert their 'academic capital' into 'economic capital'.

Elite universities and career opportunities

Most of the young men attending the elite universities appear to be very focussed on their future ambitions and careers. Only John had yet to decide on a future career. His parents, he tells, were concerned that he was not looking into future opportunities '...but they are quite happy for me to be as I am, just trying to do as well as I can in my degree before I move on'. When I asked John what his plans were once he had completed his last exam he responded:

Leave (named the university) as soon as possible. Probably go home and then hopefully forget about this ever happening and start applying for jobs somewhere so I cannot be a burden on my family and move out essentially.

John was interested in working in the Civil Service or in Consultancy. He had concerns, as previously explained, with the teaching methods employed at the university he was attending as well difficulties with adapting to living within the confines of an elite university. Each time I interviewed John, he was to a lesser or greater degree, experiencing anxieties, self-doubts and disappointments. He appeared to be in a similar position to the student described by Griffiths et al., (2005):

Away from his family and culture, separated from all the familiar props of position, status and power, this student found himself facing a void, unable to build relationships

and friendships with his peers, his self-confidence drained away (p. 276).

John was hoping that once he had left the confines of his university he could return to some semblance of what he considered normality and begin the next stage of his life, that of considering a career. He was hoping that by returning to a place (home) in which he was more comfortable things would improve for him.

The other young men attending elite universities had much clearer career plans. Graham, had been short listed for an astronaut training programme, and if chosen, he planned to do that but, if not chosen, he planned to do a PhD in astrophysics and become an academic. Ben, at the time of the final interview, was completing a law degree. He had accepted a training contract with a leading London law firm.

Craig had accepted a place with Teach First to teach history and English. He explained that when he told his step-father that he was going to do the Teach First programme his step-father had: ‘...pooh-poohed that I haven’t taken on something that is perhaps a little bit more higher salary’. But Craig goes on to explain that ‘Teach First is quite good at opening avenues’. Craig understands that the Teach First programme may open up other career opportunities for him in the future.

Ian informed me that he has applied for a position with a few companies as a computer science consultant. He explained that if he was to be offered a job that appealed to him he would take it but otherwise he would stay on and undertake a Masters before embarking on a career. When I asked Ian why he had chosen to

apply for the positions that he had, he responded that he had received advice at a computer science careers fair he attended at his university. He had also searched a data base of top 100 employers and graduate employers.

Leon had been accepted to do a Master of Arts (MA) programme at another university and was then planning to do a librarian traineeship. Adam, who was studying engineering and had a fourth year to complete, explained that he was undertaking a placement with a major international consultancy group in his summer holidays. This placement, he said, may lead to the offer of employment on graduation.

With the exception of John, all the young men at the elite universities had adapted to the academic field. They had learnt the 'rules of the game' and had even acquired 'trump cards' and good quality capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98), and were now moving on to careers appropriate to their soon to be acquired academic qualifications. All these young men understood the value of having been at an elite university. Even John told me he would make the same choice again:

because the reasons for coming here haven't changed too much. It's still going to be hard work but it's the *label*, it's three years versus fifty years you know. It's a trade-off I'm willing to make.

These young men all appeared to understand the distinction between their universities and 'others'. When I asked Adam what career plans his friends from university had, he told me that 'friends from here are sorted'. He mentioned a list of employers: leading law, accounting and consultancy firms as well as

major banks. These young men fully understood that:

The 'best' companies wanted to recruit the 'best' people who are most likely to attend the 'best' universities, because they are the hardest to enter (Brown & Hesketh, 2004, p. 11).

Withdrawals

As explained in Chapter Five, by the time I conducted the second interview at the end of the young men's second year of study, Oliver, who had been studying Sports Science had withdrawn from university. I made intensive enquiries in my efforts to contact him without success. I conducted the final interviews in the spring of 2014 when the men were in the second half of their third, and in many cases, final year of university. At this time I discovered that another young man, Nathan, also studying Sports Science, had withdrawn from university. Once again all efforts to contact him failed. I was particularly keen to interview these two young men as I thought it could provide some insight into the reasons why they decided to withdraw from university.

Men in general are less likely to begin undergraduate courses in the UK and also less likely to complete them than women (Higher Education Academy, 2011) with men from poorer backgrounds even less likely to participate and then complete higher education than those from other backgrounds (Vignoles & Powdthavee, 2009; Quinn, 2013). There are also variations in average continuation rates between the different types of university, with the elite universities having the highest continuation rates and the modern universities having the lowest overall rates (National Audit Office, 2007) (See Table 6:2).

Figures for 2012/13 from the Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited (2015) show that, on average, the elite universities had a withdrawal rate of 1.2% and the modern universities had a withdrawal rate of 9.4%. There was also a variation in withdrawal rates by entry qualification. Withdrawal rates for students who enter university with at least three As at A level was 1.9%, those with three Cs at A levels had a withdrawal rate of 4.5%. Access course student had an average withdrawal rate of 15.6% and those entering with a BTEC have an average withdrawal rate of 12.7% according to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, (2015) (See Table 6:3).

Table 6:2 Withdrawal rates by university type

Type of University	Withdrawal Rate
Elite	1.2%
Modern	9.4%

Table 6:3 Withdrawal rates by university entry qualifications

Entry Level Qualifications	Withdrawal Rate
Three A's at A Levels	1.9%
Three C's at A levels	4.5%
Access Course	15.6%
BTEC Course	12.7%

On entering university, working class young men reportedly face greater challenges integrating into university life than those from a middle class background (Lehmann, 2007). Many of the young men in my study initially found university life fraught with difficulties, mostly because as first generation university attendees they did not have the cultural capital available to students from a background where attending higher education was the norm. This was a new experience for them and for their families. Nathan had had difficulties in adjusting to university life and in the only interview I conducted with Oliver he

explained that he found the course he was undertaking undemanding. He had originally enrolled in and completed 18 months of the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) programme but voluntarily withdrew because he had experienced substantial trauma in his private life. On returning to university the following year Oliver discovered that the QTS programme had been discontinued and found himself on a course that was very much a second choice. He described the original course he was on as:

Fantastic! . . . it was interesting but hard work and kept you busy whereas this one, I will end up with a piece of paper that says I've got a degree but...

Yorke & Longden (2004) found that students who felt they had chosen the wrong course were more likely to pull out of university.

Hovdhaugen (2013) in her study on the impact of term time work and withdrawal rates among university students found that 'Students who work full-time or long-part-time work are less likely to complete their undergraduate university studies than students who work short part-time work or do not work at all' (p. 16). Oliver was also working full-time as a bar manager which involved much late night work.

Both the young men who withdrew from university did so by choice and not apparently for academic reasons. Jones & McNabb (2004) found that students from working class backgrounds were more likely to withdraw from university voluntarily and Lehmann (2007) in his study on university withdrawal rates found that middle class students withdrew as a last resort and

usually because of academic failure, whereas 'two-thirds of first generation students left voluntarily and for non-academic reasons' (p. 101).

Oliver was the only young man I interviewed attending a modern university who had obtained admission having completed A levels obtaining 2 Cs and a D. Vignoles & Powdthavee (2009) suggest that differences in academic preparation for higher education may explain some of the difference in withdrawal rates between advantaged and less advantaged students. Nathan came to university with a BTEC qualification and those with a BTEC qualification have a 12.7% chance of dropping out of university (see Table 6.3). Oliver had achieved 2 Cs and a D at A level. At this level of qualification one has over a 4.5% chance of dropping out. Both these percentages are much higher than the 1.8% chance that someone entering university with 3 As at A level has of withdrawing from university.

The two young men who withdrew from university were both at the same university doing, Sports Science. While I cannot draw any conclusions as to why they voluntarily withdrew, modern universities do have a higher withdrawal rate than elite universities (see Table 6.2).

However as Quinn (2013) suggests, withdrawing early may not necessarily be negative: 'For many students realising that this was not the right time, place or course for them allowed them to make a positive decision to move forward in the future' (p. 73). While I did not interview either of the young men once they left university, and I therefore do not know the reasons for them withdrawing, I would suggest it was a positive decision on their parts to leave as they were not required to leave for academic reasons.

Discussion

Having completed the interviews and 'watched' these young men develop over their time at university, seeing most of them eager to get on with the rest of their lives, reminded me of the sub-title of a book written in 1997 by Bynner, Ferri and Shepherd: 'Getting On, Getting By, Getting Nowhere'. While I did not get the impression that any of the young men I interviewed were 'getting nowhere', I did feel that some of them were going to be '*getting by*' in the job market. As David put it, 'job wise I think probably just be something to get by...a teaching assistant... like I haven't really started something'. In the last interview I conducted, in the last half of their last year at university, some of them said that they would concentrate on getting work once they had left university. It appeared that thinking about and looking for employment was almost an afterthought for some of the young men I interviewed.

Those young men looking to be football coaches, or just looking for a job that would 'get them by' will be entering an insecure job market offering mainly part-time work with limited or no job security and limited prospects of career development and advancement (Tholen, 2014) . On the other hand, the young men who were going to leading City law firms, consultancy firms and the like were what Bynner et al., (1997) would term as '*getting on*'. These young men had been considering their career options since the second year of university with most of them doing internships or placements in their summer holidays in the tacit understanding that this would be good for their future career. By their third year they were very focussed on obtaining employment in occupations commensurate with their academic qualifications. University had provided

these young men with the opportunities to acquire the cultural capital to enable them to confidently 'get on' (Gordon, 2013).

Bynner et al., explained that: 'People's jobs reflect, by and large, the education they have received... Those with higher education tended to fill the ranks of the professions...' (1997, p.119). This is still the case in 2015 and it is the case with the young men I interviewed. Those young men who achieved As and A*s at A level and then went on to attend elite universities are indeed about 'to fill the ranks of the professions'. The young men I interviewed who achieved BTEC qualifications and then entered modern universities found themselves studying a course directly related to the BTEC course they had studied post GCSE; that is to say, Sports Science. On completing their university courses they find that their career opportunities are limited to the area of sports coaching and teaching and the leisure industry; this in turn limits their remuneration level.

However, Brown & Hesketh claimed nearly a decade ago that we had reached a point where in some cases 'the knowledge 'dividend' associated with a university education may be declining' and yet 'students and their parents are being encouraged to see education as private investment rather than a public good' (2004, p. 232). Green & Zhu, (2010) argue that we have reached the point where some university graduates were underemployed in jobs that made little use of their university qualifications. Currently it is reported that many recent graduate take up positions in the labour market that do not require degrees; although the possession of a degree signals that the employee has some transferable skills (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2015). The Office of National Statistics report that in 2013, 47% of university

graduates were employed in non-graduate employment (ONS, 2013). In the current situation, where young people and their families will have to take on possible debts, there are growing concerns that university attendance may not be as desirable as was once thought (Green & Henseke, 2014).

Brown (2013) claims that with the massification of the higher education system where more and more people gain educational qualifications, 'credentials lose much of their value'. Unprecedented numbers now enter the workforce with a bachelor's degree which, he argues, has resulted in a change in the rules of the employment game. The effect has been that in the marketplace the price of educated labour has reduced (Brown, 2013). These 'new rules' are perhaps not always understood by all members of the working classes (Devine et al, 2005) and, according to Brown, a growing number of aspiring working class families are becoming disappointed as they do not understand the change 'in the fields of education, employment and the labour market' (2013, p. 692). A bachelor's degree no longer confers the employment benefits it once did. The situation now is what Brown describes as 'a winner-takes-all competition for the 'best' universities and employment opportunities' (2013. p. 685).

Whether these findings will be reflected in the experiences of the young men in my study is, as yet, unknown. Certainly the young men who went to elite universities have secured employment in fields considered commensurate with their qualifications and in the last interview I conducted with the young men who attended modern universities all agreed that their university qualifications would hold them in good stead in the market place.

At this point I want to reflect on two research issues that need further discussion. The first of these relates to some complexities that arose in my study because of the limits of my sample and the second concern relates to the role of discourses of masculinity in the lives of my participants. I start with the tensions involved with two sampling issues. The first relates to my sample of universities and different levels of funding for universities in the UK.

It is well-known that some institutions in England are better resourced than others (Crozier et al, 2008; Callender & Scott, 2013). The better resourced universities are usually the higher status universities and I have the funding extremes in my sample. The elite providers have 'the personnel and the resources necessary to provide students with personally focussed learning experiences' that may be in shorter supply in the newer universities (Reay et al, 2009, p. 12). Those young men in my study who attended elite universities were provided with some highly individualised learning experiences. They were assisted in finding work experience in professional organisations where they were often offered full time employment on graduation. However, Power reports that '*the* significant marker in determining occupational grouping' (2000, p. 138) is the type of HEI attended. According to Power (2000) variation in occupation is reflected in the different choice of degrees at the various types of HEI. Those attending elite universities are more likely to pursue a professional career while 40% of those attending new universities pursue managerial posts.

Some of the young men in my study who attended modern universities were hoping to pursue teaching careers while others were interested in managerial

roles in the sports and leisure industry. All of my participants at the modern universities understood that the subjects they had studied would shape their career choices to some extent but they did not see this factor as a limitation. From their perspectives they were going to seek employment in a field with which they were familiar, and one which they 'loved'. However, as my sample was restricted not only in relation to subjects being studied but also to 'type' of institution, it would on reflection have been useful to have been able to interview participants from other institutional settings such as redbrick HEIs or perhaps from other high status sports science providers. It certainly would have been useful to broaden the sample to include participants on a wider range of subjects and perhaps to have contrasted more vocationally centred programmes with generalist degrees. However, there is some consensus that the possession of a degree, any degree, is still a useful indicator of capacity to learn and aspiration to succeed and thus, graduates will still have an employability 'bonus' compared with non-graduates. (Burke, 2016)

The second sample limitation relates to the range of subjects studied by the participants in my study. There were slippages between my initial plans and designs and the outcomes in the field and, as explained in Chapter Three, I experienced serious difficulties in accessing participants. In my eventual sample while the participants at the elite universities studied a range of subjects, the participants at one modern university, from where the majority of this set of participants were recruited, all studied Sports Science. The fact that they all accessed HEI on the basis of a more vocationally oriented academic profile and all shared an enthusiasm for their subject and participated regularly in sporting

activities does mean that to some extent they had similar experiences related to this sphere of interests. In some ways, it would have been useful to have been able to recruit from a broader range of disciplines (as well as types of HEIs). However, my research concerns had undergone a process of progressive focussing (Straus & Corbin, 2008) and were not related to the subject studied. My focus was on establishing from the perspective of each participant what factors and motivators had enabled each white working class young man to experience academic success. My intention was to work to understand the 'complex social processes, to capture essential aspects of a phenomenon from the perspective of study participants and to uncover beliefs, values, and motivations that underlie individual behaviours' (Curry et al, 2009, p. 1442). My participants all identified as white working class males (signalled by their agreement in participating in my study) and this was the more critical dimension of my sample construction.

One of my theoretically driven research intentions was to explore the role played by dominant cultures of masculinity and examine any influences that aspects of these discourses may have played in the academic progress of my participants. Many of the young men who attended 'elite' HEIs had been marginalised at school for not being sporty and for adopting an academic persona. They had been 'othered' for not adopting some of the anti-school, pro-sporting cultures that were in circulation. Craig referred to being called 'geek' as did others. At university they fitted into a culture that was academically focused and where doing well was in the ascendancy. Although John was still an 'outsider' he recognised the dominance of this pro-work, success regime. What

these findings suggest is that cultures of masculinity may be changing and that different contexts produce their own cultures.

Change over time, while certainly shaped by contradictions within masculinities, may also be intentional. Children as well as adults have a capacity to deconstruct gender binaries and criticize hegemonic masculinity, and this capacity is the basis of many educational interventions and change programs. At the same time, bearers of hegemonic masculinity are not necessarily 'cultural dopes'; they may actively attempt to modernize gender relations and to reshape masculinities as part of the deal (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 853).

The young men who studied Sports Science were, as I argued in Chapter Five, more caught up in a sports-masculinity discourse through their participation in football/rugby while simultaneously maintaining their commitment to academic study. These young men have converted their 'sporting capital' into 'academic capital' and are now planning to convert this into 'economic capital'. These young men have drawn on contemporary versions of masculinities that are perhaps more complex and nuanced than older versions suggest (Gee, 2014).

I conclude this chapter by reiterating that all the young men in my study reported benefitting from their university experiences. They had all become more confident and, in terms of the Bourdieusian concepts I used to frame my

research, they had extended their social capital and they had all transformed their habituses to varying degrees. They had broadened their horizons with many of them wanting to explore other parts of the world. They all appeared to be confident about their transition from university to the world of work.

Chapter Seven

Why White Working Class Males do not Engage Academically

*Class matters because it creates unequal possibilities
for flourishing and suffering (Sayer, 2005, p. 218).*

Introduction

When I started my research I set out to discover, from the perspectives of a group of young white men from working class backgrounds who had been academically successful, how it was that they had done well against the odds. White working class males are regularly positioned as ‘failing’, underachieving and as NEETS (not in education, employment or training) (Willis, 1977; Sutton Trust, 2011). I wanted to turn this matter on its head by working with a cohort who had done well at school and were all going to university (this being my measure of academic success).

In this final data driven chapter of my study I examine the concept of success and what success means to the young men in my study. I also explore the last research question I posed when I originally began my work:

- What reasons (if any) do academically successful white working class males give for the under-achievement of many of their peers? What do they think could make an educational difference?

Success as a reality

The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘success’ as: ‘the achievement of an endeavour; the attainment of a desired end’ (1993, p. 3128).

This definition of success pertains to the reaching of a goal, perhaps in one

aspect of one's life. However, success is often more complexly constructed than this and, for many individuals the meaning of success is not static. What is meant by success can change for the individual when conditions and circumstances change and it can be experienced in some aspects of one's life but not necessarily in others. It also goes without saying that the meaning of success can vary between individuals. When the young men were asked in the third interview what they understood by 'success' Karl responded by saying: '...achieving what you feel is what you want, so it's getting to a point where you are happy'. In a similar vein David explained that for him success was: '...being like happy with yourself and what you have achieved'. These young men went on to explain that their parents did not enjoy their jobs and they believed that if their sons were academically successful they would perhaps have more career choice and be free to choose work they would enjoy. Craig had a more elaborate concept of being successful:

...achieving where you want to go... success is about overcoming the odds, and it is about... doing it yourself, being self-motivated and realising what you want and it is about others... helping you achieve that... it is also about overcoming barriers but I suppose if you kind of imagine a pole vault you've got to set yourself the challenge of jumping over that but you need to know how to do it.

While Craig saw success as achieving one's goals, he also thought that this could only be achieved with the help of other people. Adam also saw success as: '...getting to a position where you are happy with the things you have done and

just being proud of the things that you have done', but he believed, like Craig, that success was the result of finding '...ways of doing things on your own and pushing yourself like I guess finding out what your limits are, like taking on new challenges...'. So while there were slight variations in the description of what success was, most of the responses I received were similar to the interpretations given here.

Bradford & Hay (2007) suggest that success is constructed through one's social networks. In other words, while the individual may have their own interpretation of what success is, this interpretation will have been influenced by the social situations in which the individual finds themselves. Hey (2002) found that social relations were significant mediators in the lives of young people. Each set of social relations influence the individual, and each individual may deploy different constructions of what is meant by success. For example, success in school may be taken to be academic success. Within one's peer group success may be considered in career terms. For an athlete, success may be winning the race or achieving a personal best time/score.

A definition of success is often expressed from a particular perspective such as from an academic perspective, a financial perspective, a sporting perspective or from any of a myriad of other perspectives. If one looks at what it means to 'be successful' one is indeed confronted with a complex and contested concept, one that is fluid and relational, situated and specific. I will now consider one of these perspectives in more depth, one crucial to my study, that of academic success.

Academic Success

In England today baseline academic success is often taken to mean achieving at least five A* to C's at GCSE level (DfES, 2012). But can this be considered to be academically successful in the 21st century? Many occupations now require education beyond GCSE level; in fact most occupations require further training of some sort. Further study is required for those who wish to attend university: another two years of schooling beyond GCSE level has to be undertaken, at the end of which, examinations in at least three General Certificate of Education Advanced level (A level) subjects or the equivalent BTEC qualifications (a vocational qualification) have to be passed. To apply for Higher Apprenticeships in accountancy or law one also requires A level qualifications.

A certain level of academic achievement (such as achieving five A* to C's at GCSE level) can be regarded as a form of academic success. However, the notion of 'academic success,' like success in general, will mean different things to different people. Academic success therefore appears to be as contested and complex as other forms of success.

When I *initially* interviewed the eight young men attending modern universities at the beginning of their second year of university and asked them if they had been successful, they all referred to success in terms of their own academic achievements. Only one respondent, Edward, gave a negative answer: 'No I'd say like not even, probably half my ability I've used, I mean being successful is a lot of planning as well'. The others appeared to be unanimous in the belief that by navigating their way through the school system and successfully attaining entrance to university they had been academically successful, at least, to a point.

As Karl explained, in the first interview, when I asked him if he considered himself academically successful:

Half and half. I would consider myself successful because
I am now at university but at the same time I look back
and I had to try so many times to get in.

David's response was: 'I feel I have got by'. Harvey who failed his first semester at university was shocked by the experience because he had never failed anything up to then and at this point in time was not feeling successful. Frank was more positive: 'Yes, yes definitely, I am at university... I am hitting all my targets'. Mark held a more relative and tentative perspective on his success:

I would say I am compared to the average person, I
would say I was quite successful. I think I could have
done a lot better than I have done academically but I
think I have done alright.

The young men all agreed that being at university was an academic achievement. However, as discussed in Chapter Five, the institutional habitus of the modern university which encouraged independent learning and where supervision and guidance did not always appear to be readily available resulted in many of the young men holding what Reay, et al. called 'fragile and unconfident' (2009, p.9) learner identities. David who was struggling with the work load in his last semester of university commented that:

I don't know why it is so bad this year... I haven't really
got into the swing of things, yeah... I guess they just shove

you with deadlines and you get less support and stuff, is probably why it's daunting.

The young men at the modern universities were first and foremost students but most also worked part-time, many of them were playing sport for clubs outside of their university, some were living at home and those that were living near the campus would often go home during the term. Like the participants in the Reay et al., (2009) study their learner identity was just one of these competing identities.

In the first interview I undertook with the seven young men studying at elite universities they were all very definite about being academically successful prior to entering university. They all felt that obtaining a place at an elite university was a major achievement especially considering their working class backgrounds. On arrival at university their learner identities were strong. However, six of the young men found it difficult adjusting to the academic side of university life. Their learner identities were 'dented'. As Craig commented:

...all of a sudden I am not the best... I have always been able to just answer the questions and suddenly... I can't answer all of the questions and people answer before me and it is very, very visible.

Not being the best was a new experience for each of these six young men. It had taken them some time to adjust to a new way of learning in the university setting too. As Adam explained:

I just needed to change my method of learning a little

bit... I think that was a big disadvantage for people who came from state schools, yes just the way of learning is different.

The young men in my study attending elite universities, like those nine working class students attending an elite university in Reay et al's (2009) study, found that:

Even experience of earlier academic success and a positive learner identity does not compensate for the self-doubt that inevitably emerges when confronted with a totally unfamiliar educational field (p. 1112).

As John explained:

No, I didn't think it was going to be as hard as this sort of thing. I thought it was going to be difficult and a lot of people would be better than me but I thought the hard bit of coming here would be that I was going to be one of the smart people here sort of thing but it is more a case of it doesn't really matter how smart you are, you have to work incredibly hard no matter what you do.

So although these young men had experienced academic success at school and had positive learner identities, like Reay et al's cohort 'they still experienced struggle, challenge and difficulty, particularly in the first year' (2009, p. 1112). Six of these young men did acknowledge that they thought that being at an elite university and achieving even average marks was a sign of academic success.

These young men hold relative concepts of success.

The seventh young man, Graham, did not have the same problems of settling in or facing challenges to his learner identity that the other six reported. He found that he was one of the brightest students in his particular discipline and consistently achieved firsts. When asked to describe his first year he told me that:

I think it is a very unique experience, I really enjoyed doing it (the work) and you get to experience it in an entirely different way to how you have done it before.

The work becomes part of the lifestyle and you become a different person basically.

This young man adapted very quickly and successfully to life at university. He explained that:

It was a bit hard for the first few weeks because some of the things I hadn't done at maths A levels were being covered fairly rapidly... you can't comprehend what the workload is like until you get here. So it is hard to adjust but fun and if you enjoy what you are doing, then it doesn't feel like work.

Graham was only 'a fish out of water' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) for a few weeks. This is an example of habitus changing and adapting fairly quickly (Bourdieu, 2005).

For most of the young men in my study it appeared that early in their university careers they were unsure of themselves. However by the end of their third year these young men, with the exception of Edward, had developed more positive attitudes and considered themselves to be successful. Even David, who was struggling with the workload, replied positively when I asked him if he had been successful: 'Yeah I think I'm successful, really successful'. Graham too responded in the affirmative: 'Yes I am loving it here, it is what I have always wanted to do'. Frank's response to the question was a confident:

Yeah because I wouldn't be sat here if I wasn't. I think I have made bad choices in life but it's being able to learn from them and being able to make sure that I've got myself into the best place possible at this current point in time to progress forward.

All but one of the young men in my study believed that by having obtaining the necessary qualifications to attend university they had been academically successful. Once at university however their notion of academic success changed and for a period of time most of them experienced 'a crisis of confidence' (Reay et al., 2009, p. 1112) in their academic abilities. This crisis of confidence varied in length for each of the young men but by the end of their third year all but Edward considered that they had indeed achieved academic success. As the young men in my study discovered, getting into university is one form of success but getting on once there is another challenge.

A sense of disenfranchisement....

While these young men did experience academic success many of their cohort do not and the persistent underachievement of white working class males has been an ongoing concern and is well documented (Hills et al., 2010; Sutton Trust, 2013; Strand, 2014). In this section I analysis the explanations for this phenomenon given by the young men in my study. Their explanations were often constructed with reference to themselves and their experiences of family and school life in an environment where so many of their cohort failed to thrive academically. From my coding and analysis of my data four broad categories emerged: *family, teachers and school, role models/mentors, lack of aspiration and fear of failure.*

Family habitus...capital

The majority of the young men in my study raised the importance of the family and more particularly the role of parents in encouraging educational success in their offspring. From what they said, it was clear that my participants recognised that habitus plays a central role in influencing, if not determining, educational outcomes. And in what they said it was possible to trace Bourdieu's claims about the primary habitus of the home and its role in establishing sets of conscious and unconscious practices (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). For example, Karl believed that white working class males' lack of engagement with education emanated, in part, from a lack of cultural capital on the part of some working class parents; the parents did not always know enough about the education system to be able to advise their children. Research confirms this view (Reay, 1998b; Sylva et al., 2003; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). For example, according to Sylva et al., (2003) in their report on effective pre-school

education, the discrepancy between middle class and working class children lies in the differences in 'home learning environment' (p.29). They go on to explain that things such as parent's reading with their children, taking them to the library, encouraging activities such as playing with letters and numbers, singing with them and teaching them nursery rhymes benefits their child's cognitive development and are more typically deployed in middle class families (Sylva et al., 2003). These cognitively developmental activities are educationally advantageous for the child. Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) in their review of the impact of parental involvement and support and family education on pupil achievements and adjustments, suggest that parental involvement not only effects a child's academic achievements but also their staying on rates at school and their educational aspirations generally.

Reay (1998b) in her study on both working class and middle class mothers' involvement in their children's schooling found that mothers across both classes supported their children's schooling. However when Reay (1998b) used Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus and cultural capital to focus on what mothers were actually doing she found that the influences and complexities of class defined the options available to the mothers. Things such as material resources, educational knowledge and a woman's own educational experiences all impacted on capacity to support their children's schooling. Working class women often have to work long hours, economically they may be stretched and they may feel inhibited by their own level of education. Reay's work suggests that while working class mothers support their children's schooling, the cultural capital available to them and their habitus may limit their ability to have the

same impact on their children's education trajectory compared to middle class parents.

Ian suggested that part of the problem, as he saw it, of white working class males' underachievement was a lack of motivation on the part of the boys themselves. He saw girls as being more self-motivated whereas he felt that boys needed 'to get that motivation from someone in a position of authority... your parents... encouraging you'. Ian raised this issue in two of the three interviews we had and he went on to say: 'I think it is kind of firstly a lack of enthusiasm from the parents about it (education)'. Mark too thought that parental encouragement was crucial and without it young people failed to engage with education. Oliver also saw parental encouragement as an important factor: 'I would say that the main thing would be what your parents are like, whether they encourage you to do well from a young age'. Harvey also explained that his mother was the driving force behind his continuing education '...she can see in 20 years' time... if you go and do this then the benefits for you are going to be much higher'. He explained that a lot of young men do not have this level of parental support and 'like they don't think it's (education) for them'. Mothers in particular appear to have a strong influence on a child's educational aspirations (Jackson & Marsden, 1966; Reay, 2005; Matthys, 2013).

The idea that Harvey expressed 'like they don't think it's (education) for them' is what Willis found in his ethnographic study on what he called 'young non-academic disaffected males' (1977, p. 2). Leon suggested that parents who were not formally well educated themselves were less likely to value education and 'pass that down to their children'. However, Karl thought that the encouragement to go on to further education and then higher education came

from both the home and the school. Mark said that some working class boys took education 'for granted and think it is something I've got to do and then rebel against it'.

Cultures of masculinity - doing what Dad does

Dominant forms of masculinities are often referred to in the research on the failure of young white males to engage with education. Reay (2002) refers to dominant forms of masculinity that influence many young working class boys, who see education as 'feminine' and therefore not for them. Smith (2007) records that the young men in his study interpreted school work, a mental activity, as 'feminine' and the diametric opposite of manual labour which is what 'real' men do. As explored in Chapter One, for the young white men in Willis' (1977) study, paid work was 'the working class counter-school culture' (p.2). The young men in his study saw education as being for girls and physical work as being the 'real thing'. The influence of these forms of dominant masculinities enabled the young men to draw on a form of cultural capital that compensated for but at the same time contributed to their educational failure (Power et al, 2003). Several young men in my study explained that many of their cohort treated school and education with disdain, leaving school as soon as they legally could.

Another claim made by my participants was that working class young men traditionally follow their fathers. Oliver described it as 'Dad sort of knows what he is talking about with money so, I just like follow that kind of thing and not go to university'. Edward had school friends who thought:

...they'd go into their Dads' job when they were 16... I just think it is usually their parents have jobs like in the trades and stuff and they get jobs from it. It is easy for their Dad to give them a job and they just get used to it and bosh, they are in a fulltime job. A lot of examples from my mates at school, their Dads' own a company or electrical whatever, and they just go into it just because their Dad owns it.

Leon commented 'Where I was brought up was quite a rural and agricultural area, a lot of kids and Dads were farmers'. Leon went on to explain that some of the white working class boys he was at school with did reasonably well academically but did not consider higher education because 'their parents had always worked manually and they just didn't know anything different'. This view was echoed by Adam who told me that most of the young people in his school had parents 'in vocational jobs so that is their plan'. David told me that one of his friends 'is working in Marks and Spencer's waiting for his Dad to die so he can take his business'.

Craig explained that, as he saw it, in the past: 'it used to be acceptable for you as a white working class boy to grow up and do the same job as your Dad and that used to be a source of pride'. Craig was from a naval town and, in the past, many of the working class boys in this area were employed at 16 in industries involved in ship building:

If you weren't on the ship, you were making the ships and
if you weren't making the ships you were controlling the

ships... But now we are in this curious transition period where that idea of you just go and do what your father did is not there.

Craig pointed out that the occupations that these young men used to go into now no longer exist. The ship building industry in his area no longer exists; the employment that it provided has disappeared and the navy has contracted so jobs have been shed there also. Hence the employment opportunities for white working class young men with limited academic qualifications have shrunk considerably in Craig's town. Craig went on to say that 'there is no established tradition of going into academia for working class boys because they always did what their Dad did', so they often do not consider university as an option.

David told me that, in his view, some fathers of white working class boys often see education as unnecessary:

I think if they are white working class, and their Dad's like a sparky or something, they'd probably get it in the ear all the time about how it's (education) useless and how you might as well just go out and get a job and start earning money.

According to Jones (2012), for most white working class young men, education does not seem to be relevant. 'It represents a tragic lack of confidence on their part in the ability of education to be even remotely relevant to their lives' (Jones, 2011, p.176).

The Home Environment and Comfort Zone

David suggested that some of the young men he knew did do reasonably well academically but they chose not to go to university because:

they are so sheltered they don't want to live on their own
they don't want to go into an environment that is
unsettling they just want to stay in their own environment
and comfort zone... It is just like their comfort zone. They
don't want to go through change... so I think it is more
kind of like their attitude.

Adam who came from a mining town also suggested that: 'people don't really move away from my area. Once you are there you are there'. Craig too explains this attachment to the familiar:

everyone knows everyone, it is very incestuous, everyone
has gone to the same school that their parents have gone
to and has done the same things. Everyone supports
(names football team) there is still very much that
cohesion.

He goes on to explain that many people have barely stepped out of the town and they stay in the town even if they cannot find work. Craig uses his brother as an example: 'he wants to move out but I don't know if he will... He resigns himself to it because that is what his friends are doing'. Hoggart (1957, p. 22) suggested that:

the more we try to reach the core of working class

attitudes, the more surely does it appear that the core is a sense of the personal, the concrete, the local: it is embodied in the idea of, first, the family and, second, the neighbourhood. This remains, though much works against it.

Hoggart went on to suggest that 'the old tradition is being encroached upon... But the strong sense of the importance of home ensures that change is taken slowly' (1957, p. 29). While his work pre-dates that of Bourdieu's, in what Hoggart talks of it is possible to discern the influence of the primary habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The local remains very important to those from a working class background; they are very strongly attached to the familiar, they have a strong attachment to their locality, the space they know, as well as to friends and family. Many working class people find it difficult to be separated from this local attachment (Archer et al., 2010).

When Frank told his mother that he wanted to go to university he informed me that she had responded "look if you don't really want to, no one is going to think any different of you okay?' I was like no I want to go to university'. His mother then wanted him to pick a university close to the family, so one of the universities he put on his UCAS application was 'because it was close to home and it kept Mum's mind at bay because she knew I'd be kind of close to her'. Interestingly the university that Frank is attending is quite some distance (200 miles) from his family home and Frank explained that he was: 'kind of glad I picked (names current university) because it is far enough away but I can still go back'. Frank also commented that his sister did not want him to go to

university and his mother was concerned that he was so far from home.

This concept that the working classes navigate the space that is familiar to them and often remain within a familiar space has been developed by Appadurai (2004). He suggests that the better off in a society have a larger stock of available experiences of the relationship between aspirations and outcomes because they are in a better position to explore diverse experiences and transcend the limits of the local. They have used the map of society's norms to navigate and explore these diverse experiences, sharing this knowledge with one another more routinely than their less well-off neighbours. These better off members of a society can navigate the complex steps between wants and wishes more easily than those who are less well-off. This is not because those who are less well-off do not have aspirations, wishes, plans and needs but they often lack the 'opportunities to practice this use of navigational capacity' (p. 69). This results in a more brittle horizon of aspirations for the less well-off simply because they have limited opportunities to use these navigational skills (Appadurai, 2004). As Appadurai explains it, navigation involves the capacity to travel beyond the boundaries of one's neighbourhood, navigating space and exploring diverse opportunities. This ability to navigate space is less available to those with limited resources.

The young men in my study appear to have been able to mobilize themselves thereby expanding their 'capacity to aspire within a specific social and cultural milieu' (Appadurai, 2004, p. 70). However, most of their friends from home have remained attached to the space that was familiar to them, navigating only within that space both socially and for work.

Teachers and schools

Raising aspirations

Other factors raised by the young men in my study when discussing why they think white working class young males tend to do less well educationally were related to the role of the teachers, the school and the educational process. The quality of teachers' relationships with students was found by Dunne & Gazeley (2008) to be an important factor in students learning as were the provision of engaging activities for students and listening to what students had to say about their learning. These themes also came through in my interviews.

For instance, Craig thought that schools could do more to 'nurture most simply the intellect and provide more experiences for working class students such as trips to museums, the theatre and the like'. Ben suggested that good guidance from members of staff was important and 'aspiring to traditionally successful paths could very much be encouraged by members of staff'. Ian suggested that from year 5 or 6 children could be taught to understand the benefits of education because 'it is really easy to get into the idea that school is something that you have to do and you just make your way through until it is finally over'. Adam explained that over two thirds of the students in the school he attended left after GCSEs. He commented: 'I think our school accepts that its catchment area isn't the best' so that the students 'were never pushed'. This claim that schools accept that working class children will leave school at 16 with or without qualifications was made by several of the young men in my study and research by Dunne & Gazeley (2008) on teacher actions and assumptions about working class academic performance confirm this view. Dunne & Gazeley (2008) suggest that:

Teacher reluctance to explicitly acknowledge pupils' social class identities helped to maintain the educational conditions in which middle-class pupils were encouraged to achieve while the underachievement of many working class pupils was normalised (p. 452).

The failure of many working class children to enter university was not seen as a problem but to be expected (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008). Dunne & Gazely went on to report that: 'Pupils, unlike teachers, highlighted the importance of teachers and saw what they did and what happened in classrooms as central to their achievement' (p. 460). However, Bourdieu did suggest that the primary habitus of the home could be transformed into a secondary habitus; specifically he was referring to children's experiences in educational settings. From what my participants said, while they had positive school-based experiences, this was not the lot of many of their working class peers.

Harvey, Graham and Edward suggested that school children should be informed by the school/teachers of the possibilities that are open to them if they do well academically. In the same vein, Adam thought that schools should inform their students of careers such as those in financial services or in the law 'that people don't really have any experience with'. Graham suggested that it would be helpful if schools had:

more external people coming into schools and telling them about what different like careers and things are actually like. Yes, that is what is really missing; you are stuck in the school system and you don't really know where it ends.

And what needs to happen, the reason you don't know
how it ends is because you get to choose how it ends, that
isn't something that we have got. Yes, so it is about you and
your choice, not about what the teachers say.

The young men in my study suggested that there was often a dearth of
information on further and higher education options available to students from
a working class background and they thought that schools could fill this gap.
They were suggesting that schools could assist social mobility by extending
their social capital to more of their students. They also suggested that teachers
often appeared to have the expectation that most students from a working class
background would leave school on completing their compulsory education.

Research by Foskett et al (2008) on the influence of the school in the decision to
participate in learning post-16 found that the SES (socio economic status) of the
school's intake strongly shaped the ethos, aims and *aspirations* of the school.
However, the nature of the school, its leadership and values could, according to
Foskett et al., (2008) operate to reinforce or counteract the SES context of its
intake.

Where schools with different orientations operate in
similar SES contexts they generate different patterns of
progression achievement. (Foskett et al., 2008, p. 60).

My participants, in a positive vein, suggest that if the aspirations and policies of
the school and its leadership encourage post-16 education for all, this
progression can become more concretely embedded in the ethos of the school
and thereby become an aspiration for the students attending school. They were

suggesting that if schools' cultural capital embodied the belief that all students stay on at school beyond the compulsory school leaving age this could assist social mobility. This point was made by all the young men in my study.

Setting and streaming, categorizing and labelling

Several of the young men in my study spoke about the effects that they thought setting and streaming had on the aspirations of white working class students. Streaming in UK secondary schools had virtually died out by the 1970's with teaching mainly occurring in mixed ability groups but by the 1990's successive governments urged the re-introduction of some form of ability grouping in schools (Hallam & Parsons, 2013).

Ability based grouping is a contentious issue within UK education with researchers divided over the potential advantages and disadvantages of this practice. Some researchers suggest that high ability students are 'held back' in mixed ability classes and that these students are stretched when setting or streaming are in place (Loveless, 1999 in Hodgen, 2011). Other researchers assert that sets and streaming are the principle cause of underachievement, arguing that lower achievers in particular receive a poorer educational experience in setted or streamed environments (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). There is also controversy over how ability is assessed and a review of the literature by Sukhnandan & Lee (1998) suggests that often the basis for assessing children is inconsistent and subjective. It also appears that movement between ability groups is limited (Macintyre & Ireson, 2002) which could mean that an individual's educational path is determined at a very young age (Hallam & Parsons, 2013).

Several of the young men in my study suggested that being put in a particular set acted as an academic deterrent:

I just think you have got to try and make it (schooling) more inclusive... If you are in the lower set you obviously prime yourself that you are no good at it. So maybe they could abolish the sets and then have a mixture of sets and then use the smart people, well set the smart people to help the lower ones (Harvey).

John raised the issue of sets and the negative effect it could have on some students:

I think a lot of the time you got sorted into a lower set or something and it was like oh that's me done, I'm never going to be smart enough kind of situation... they see it as people giving up on them more than anything.

John suggested that being put in a lower set was taken to mean (rightly or wrongly) that teachers did not see you as academically able and therefore had low expectations for you.

As stated by the young men in my study and as research has shown, streaming and setting has an overall negative educational and social effect on those who find themselves in the lower streams. The participants in my study repeatedly stated that they thought that many white working class young males were negatively impacted if they were in the lower ability groups at school.

Graham thought that some children may have had:

some kind of initial disadvantage coming from home for example. That then gets amplified by the school system... It is about finding what they want to do and point then in the direction to do that... Yes, school should be about supporting people on what they want to do.

Taking Graham's quote perhaps we could postulate that a child goes to school with 'some kind of initial disadvantage' such as coming from a low socio-economic background, being male, having a mother without educational qualifications, being raised in a one parent family, having been born in the summer and not having been read to at home. If a child experiences these initial educational disadvantages he may well find himself in the bottom set or stream at school, because according to Hallam & Parsons (2013), the characteristics listed above are those that children in the bottom set or stream often exhibit. These initial educational disadvantages are then 'amplified by the school system' rather than improved by it because, as the research outlined above suggests, setting or streaming can exacerbate the problems rather than improve them.

Frank was critical of some teachers suggesting that: 'some teachers aren't putting the work in; they are just saying, right you are a problem child, you'll go to one side... If the teachers don't help then the kids have no hope'. Could it be that 'problem children' are created in a setted or streamed school? Setting and streaming may also affect the school's reaction to how they teach a child. The quality of teaching and resources may differ between the streams or sets with the better qualified and experienced teachers teaching the top stream or set as

this is seen as the best use of the teachers' expertise in a performative culture (Hallam, Ireson & Davies, 2002). According to Hallam & Parsons (2013):

Based on stereotypes and past experience, teachers hold low expectations for low ability students. Perceiving these views, students lower expectations for themselves confirming and further reducing expectations (p. 517).

The next data extract is from David, one of the participants in my study. It is a lengthy quote but I think it is worthy of inclusion because it gives an overview of what the school experience is like for some white working class young men.

David recalled that in high school:

I was in the bottom set for everything, I didn't really do anything I just messed about... when it got closer to the exams (GCSE) because I was the best in the bottom sets I wanted to go up so that I could do the higher ones (subjects) so that I could actually get at least a try, but they wouldn't have any of it. They just said because I hadn't applied myself 'you just can't do that if you mess about the whole year'. Yeah well I was in the bottom set for everything, always in the naughty class or whatever, no one really taught anyone, the teachers would just sit back there and basically give up because everyone would... it was all just the naughty kids, basically unteachable in a way, but I ended up doing alright, I got

A-C's, I could have got higher but you can't really get out (of the bottom set)... the teachers would've given up, they just give you books and stuff, but... I wasn't always in the bottom set, it was kind of slowly went down. So once you're in the high set and don't apply yourself same as the other kids or you don't do the work they will just drop you down the sets, so it's not on your results, it's on your application. It's dead end... It's the write-off class, the bottom one. So I think the way they look at it is, they've taken out all the naughty kids out of all the other classes who distract all the other kids, they've shoved them all in one class so all the other kids can get the 80%, 90%...

David told this story in a very level headed way. He was not 'blaming' anyone and he was aware that this was very much from his perspective. David was the exception in his GCSE bottom set class. The other young people in his class, according to David, did not have any expectation of experiencing academic success, and it appears, from what David said that the teachers also have little expectation that those children in the lower set would experience academic success. Thus, it could be argued that the 'habitus' of the school positions white working class males as 'deficit' and as 'not academic' and this view underpins everything that takes place.

Ireson & Hallam (2009) found that students' academic self-concept was strongly related to the set they were in with those in the lowest ability set

having a negative academic self-concept and those in the highest ability set having a positive academic self-concept. In their survey of 1500 teachers Hallam & Ireson (2005) found that there were considerable differences in the teaching of low and high ability groups, even when the same teacher taught both groups. The children in the lower streams were taught a different curriculum in a different manner with less discussion, less homework, less feedback, more practical work and more repetition. It is sobering to note the findings of Hallam & Parsons (2013) that more than half the children in the bottom stream 'were classified as living in poverty' (p.533). I end this section with the note that 'teachers and schools *can* make a difference – by believing, and acting as if, all students have the potential to succeed' (Hodgen, 2011, p. 219) (my italics).

University as an option?

The young men in my study suggested that for many white working class young men, university is not considered as an option. Several of the participants explained that the schools they attended did not have a university focus and it was not discussed by their teachers. A few of the young men had had school friends come and visit them at university and many of their visitors expressed surprise at what university was, as can be seen in the quote below.

Adam told me that university:

is never really something that people think about... like
when my friends come to visit like most of them say they
wished they had applied to university... just like (they)
weren't genuinely aware that there were options to go to

university... people need to be encouraged, I guess yes,
the school could encourage more people to apply to
university.

Ben suggested that many teachers do not believe that their white working class students have the potential to get into elite universities.

if there are no members of staff who are actively
encouraging their students to go for it, then students are
just going to think 'no one from my school has ever gone
to Oxbridge'.

He felt it was important to have individual staff members who encouraged young people to apply to elite universities 'and who are also dispelling the ridiculous myths that go around about this place'. Many of the young men expressed similar thoughts. They felt that in many cases the teachers at the schools they attended did not or could not provide enough information about the best subjects to study if one wanted to attend university, about the different types of university i.e. modern, red brick or elite, the different academic requirements of the various types of university and so on.

The Sutton Trust is aware of this deficit and it piloted a Teacher Summer School in the summer of 2014 at two elite universities, one in England and one in Scotland. The teachers targeted for this summer school were from schools that send relatively few students to leading universities and are sited in areas of socio-economic challenge. According to the Sutton Trust (2014) the aims are:

To showcase the summer schools, with the intention of

increasing applications from target schools, and,
ultimately, increasing applications to leading universities

By combining elements of Continuing Professional
Development with activities around university
admissions and applications – as well as a residential
experience to help de-mystify the universities – we hope
that the summer schools will reach teachers in schools
who may not otherwise attend outreach events (Sutton
Trust, 2014).

It does appear to be the case that some teachers are not providing school
students with a full knowledge of the options available to them on leaving
school including higher education options. Teachers have the opportunity to
transform the primary habitus of their students by exposing them to aspects of
cultural and social capital that would be useful in promoting the benefits of
education beyond compulsory schooling and, the possibilities that an extended
education may bring. Even before they leave school, some children who are
considered to be less able may be being encouraged, according to Wolf (2011)
in her review of vocational education, to take courses which might contribute to
school performance tables, but not actually benefit the students themselves.
This can leave some students with no capacity to attend university because the
subjects they have studied are not recognized by the universities.

Role models/mentors

The young men who participated in my study suggested that mentors and/or role models could be critical for working class children because often parents did not have the cultural or social capital needed to make wider educational opportunities available to their children. Graham thought that:

there is the potential for a role model to be a powerful influence to most people... Yes, I think people in general just need help to find what they want to do. Then they will be able to find their way themselves.

Leon suggested that:

every child has one individual person who makes them aware that they are really important and they can do really good things; you know that is the main thing...

For Harvey it was 'all about that role model maybe someone giving them a bit of leadership'. He went on to suggest that young men from white working class backgrounds who are currently at university could act as these role models.

the youth of today they relate to the youth, peers, more than anything... so if they see someone else taking the initiative to go off to uni then it will give them that little bit of motivation.

Ian said that for him having a teacher mentor who was prepared to challenge him was extremely beneficial:

just having the right teacher really helped me... the maths teacher was really enthusiastic about maths... he would give me something more challenging more interesting... So that like really helped and showed that some people can really enjoy it, instead of just having to do it, you can enjoy some academic things. I think that really helps.

This perspective is supported in the academic literature which suggests that the role of a mentor can be important for the academic success of young men from a working class background (Spencer, 2007; Travers, 2011). As discussed in Chapter Four, those being mentored have been shown to develop positive attitudes toward the activity that they engage in with their mentor and research has been shown this to be the case for students who are mentored in the school environment (Tennenbaum, Crosby and Gliner, 2001; Blinn-Pike, 2007). Teacher mentors can provide academic stimulus, support and guidance as well as non-academic support (Jacobi, 1991; Travers, 2011). In what they said, it could be argued that my participants realised that key individuals could expose white working class males to aspects of cultural capital that would be useful in promoting positive attitudes to education. Craig commented that:

...I would also say that white, working class boys have been neglected I don't know why that is but I never felt I had a role model and role models I think are important.

Lack of aspiration and a fear of failure

There appears to be a lack of academic aspiration among many white working class males and this is often seen as a deficit on their part. According to

Hargreaves (2004) those children who find themselves unable to experience academic success will produce a 'self' that is valued in other ways. This could include being good at football, not putting any effort in to academics, being disruptive, or attacking those students who are academically successful (Sennett & Cobb, 1973; Smith, 2007).

The students who are not academically successful and produce a 'self' that is 'other' may then be described as lacking aspiration. According to many of the young men who participated in my study this lack of aspiration may be caused by a number of different factors not all attributable to the young men themselves. Leon explained the lack of aspiration and underachievement as a culture:

there is a sort of masculine culture we have in the UK... it is very important as a teenage boy to be into that and be part of that and have friends and that involves underachieving, sort of consciously, and doing other things with your time... not to do well academically, it is important when you are a teenager to want to buy into the popular culture and have friends.

Graham also suggested that: 'we have a kind of culture established where it is cool to be innumerate...'. John shared this view: '...it was like a race to the bottom in terms of effort in the classroom... I think the culture was very much against (school) work'.

These comments from the young men in my study echo similar themes to those expressed in the 1970s by the 'lads' in Willis' ethnographic study on young

working class men and their transitions from school to work. 'The lads' referred to any young boys interested in academics as 'ear'oles' whose academic success could 'be discredited as passive, mental and lacking a robust masculinity' (Willis, 1977, p. 150). As 'the lads' saw it: 'Manual labour is associated with the social superiority of masculinity, and mental labour with the social inferiority of femininity' (Willis, 1977, p. 148).

The essence of being 'one of the lads' lies within the group.... Joining the counter-school culture means joining the group, and enjoying it means being with the group (Willis, 1977, p. 23).

Is this still the case today? Is being 'one of the lads' important for many white working class boys? According to the young men who participated in my study being 'one of the boys' and adopting a counter-school culture still holds sway for many young white men from a working class background.

John explained that he thought many young working class men were resigned to their fate: '...I'm never going to have a chance to do it because I'm not smart enough'. Craig also referred to a lack of aspiration and 'defeatism; a lack of ambition and sense of disenfranchisement... 'I have no say, I have no control''. He went on to explain that he thought that some young white working class males gave up on academics '...way too quickly' and:

then it sort of drew all the people from my school in to that sort of class of giving up... in terms of effort there was a race to the bottom... a sort of critical mass of people not caring...

Craig went on to say that for some young men it was better not to try than to try and then fail:

Yeah it feels like there's a risk that they are not prepared to take in actually putting the effort in... like if I don't revise and get a poor grade that's okay, if I do revise and get a poor grade, that's a terrible sort of situation.

He went on to explain that academic success was often an unknown quantity for white working class males. If they do succeed academically what then? Craig felt that there was often no one to explain to these young men that going on to further and higher education was an option for them.

I see a fear of trying, the fear of doing something unknown... I think it is a lack of aspiration for young working class boys. I think... there is no established tradition of going into academia for working class boys because they always did what their Dad did... in the mines or something like that. That has gone now... And there is a great deal of disenchantment... a resignation... No one I know has been to university so I am not going to go to university... it is not cool. There is not the money, there is not the support and there is not the established tradition of it, in the white working class communities.

Frank echoed similar sentiments:

they feel that they are in a lower class so they are going to finish in the lower class... you're always going to get the

people that are just going to give up straight away, too
scared to try anything.

Harvey recounts that for some of the white working class young men he was at school with '...there is just no motivation especially academically, English and maths and stuff, they just don't want to do it. They just don't find it interesting'.

Frank too felt that one of the issues for people coming from a similar background to him and not going to university was that: '...people aren't getting the motivation. They are just thinking I'll just get through school, I'm not going to do very well and will just fail, just drop out and get a job'. Adam informed me in the area he was from:

it's just the norm (to underachieve academically) and
people don't aspire to do anything more than they are
required to. People all want to leave school when they are
16, just get a job around and then their kids will do the
same... so my area isn't the best for employability or
academically.

Nathan explained that in his experience many boys did not enjoy school and they, like the young people where Adam grew up, 'were dying to get out of school... they couldn't wait to leave to have freedom'. Croll et al., (2008) in their study on the implications of student's attitudes to school found that 'children who are planning to leave school at 16 enjoyed school less and were less sure that it had anything to offer them' (p.382).

Could the behaviours exhibited by the young men who are not seen as academic be self-protective behaviours as postulated by Covington (1992; Covington &

Beery, 1976) and presented as a 'self-worth theory'. This theory holds that some students are motivated to protect their sense of self-worth rather than make a risky attempt to succeed academically. Covington (2000) explains that academically successful students define success in terms of 'becoming the best they can be' (p.181). These students value academic ability. Other students, according to Covington, who do not see themselves as academic, may engage in failure avoidance techniques. 'The failure-avoiding tactics involved here have many guises, but whatever their form or character, they are all linked to the fear of failure' (Covington, 2000, p. 181).

One of the 'dominant' explanations given for the academic under-achievement of white working class males is that they become drawn into counter-school cultures of alternative forms of masculinity. Education is side-lined in favour of street-culture, contemporary music, sports and being with like-minded peers (Stahl, 2015). As Jackson suggests, it may be a combination of some dominant forms of hegemonic masculinities as well as self-maintenance:

that 'laddish' behaviours may indeed protect the self-worth and/or social worth of many boys, and that 'laddishness' may be prompted by both a fear of academic failure and a fear of the 'feminine' (2003, p. 585).

John raises the issue of teachers' aspirations and expectations, or lack thereof, for some white working class boys:

To be honest they could do a lot better than they were doing, I don't think the teachers helped a lot of the time because they just sort of... once they had lowered their

aspirations themselves of the pupils they just sort of matched that and thought 'right okay, we'll aim for the C grade if we can or lower' something like that a lot of the time.

In their study, Hallam & Parsons (2013) suggested that some teachers held lower expectations for students regarded as lower ability students, based on stereotypes and past experience. Dunne & Gazeley (2008) found that teachers would temper their teaching strategies based on the social class of the cohort of students. Teachers however often did not acknowledge that their teaching strategies were based on social class identifications. This highlights:

the importance of a reflexive pedagogy through which teachers acknowledge their part in constructing conditions and opportunities for pupils to learn and critically explore the implications of their own practice (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008, p. 460).

Craig who was going into teaching through the Teach First programme suggested that:

even these people who disrupt in lessons, even these people who resign themselves, they know somewhere back there, I am convinced they know that there has got to be something better than this. That is what I try to encourage. You know if you think that, if you think there is that one niggling bit of feeling in your head that you are not happy with the way you are, with what you are doing

with your life, change it, because you can. Don't let anything hold you back.

What the young men in my study appeared to be saying was that teachers can play an important role in igniting the academic spark in students from a working class background, when they first arrive at school and they play an equally vital role in keeping that spark alive. Their interest may also serve to maintain a pro-school culture rather than educational disengagement.

Leon raised the issue of funding and the wider material context of people's lives:

I think saying to everyone you should be applying to a good university and you can all get in if you work hard by trying just ignores the realities of people's wider lives... I think we can firstly make sure that education is funded correctly and that people are funded correctly.

For some white working class young people home life can be very complicated. Some of them may be caring for an ill member of the family, the economic situation may be difficult at home and their living conditions may be a problem. Leon is suggesting these factors need to be considered before a child can be expected to achieve academic success.

Leon then went on to say that he thought schools should ensure:

That just ordinary people who want to come to school, do a decent amount and then just go away, they weren't disrupted by others or (if they) weren't really talented

didn't kind of get pushed into a filter. I think it is hard though, I think teaching is an impossible job and I don't envy them at all.

Leon believes that all children are entitled to a good basic education equitably delivered but that it is not realistic to expect everyone in society to go on to higher education.

Football: A substitute for education?

Seven of the young men I interviewed chose to study Sports Science at university not only because of their love of sport and more particularly football (except in Frank's case, his chosen sport was rugby) but also because they had had an inspirational physical education teacher at some stage in their school career. They all played football or rugby in some form throughout their university careers. While they had managed to combine their love of sport and academics, they commented that football often took precedence over school work (for many working class boys). Craig suggested that boys and under achievement is very much looked upon a lot of the time as:

oh boys will be boys' thing... when boys didn't do well at my old school it was fine because they were really good at football... Football mad, football, football, football... Didn't get a very good maths grade? 'That's okay because I got an A in PE'. And there is very much a mentality of not addressing the real problem. It is a hope and people use it because they don't want to work hard... Face the reality that you are going to have to work for your maths GCSE...

the ambition doesn't exist, the ambition is the dream...

Which isn't really an ambition. It is a fallacy, it is a fantasy...

So many people stumble through life...

A great deal of research (Francis; 1999; Power et al, 2003; Smith, 2007) has highlighted the role of football in the lives of many young working class men. From the viewpoint of their peers, the boys who were good at football were seen as 'cool' (Power et al., 1998). Football prowess proves that young men are 'hard' (Smith 2007). In my earlier study (Travers 2011), I was told by Chris, one of the academically successful white working class participants, that he felt very strongly that the major reason why many white working class boys did not succeed academically was because they held aspirations of being the next 'Beckham' or 'Rooney'. Many young men were caught up with this popular notion of success and they would then spend their time focusing on football as opposed to academics. Dreaming that they would indeed one day become a renowned footballer with all the trappings of success that came with it, that is to say, fame and fortune, study and academics were seen as irrelevant to their ambitions.

However, the versions of masculinities that are on offer as resources for identity construction in HEI's may be more complex, more emotionally versatile and may offer a challenge to some of the more limited versions that exist. Indeed, Gee (2014) talks of what she refers to as 'flexible masculinities' and her case is that role models like David Beckham 'bend the codes' of masculinity – even in relation to sports (p. 917) she makes the point that even so, Beckham represents a white, heterosexual portrayal of this flexible masculinity. The

young men who attended modern universities and were studying Sports Sciences appear to have been able to draw on their earlier cultures of masculinity in order to perform their emergent identities of young graduates.

Discussion

The majority of the young men in my study highlighted the central role of the family and more particularly the powerful influence of parents in encouraging educational success in their offspring. From what they said, it was clear that my participants recognised that habitus plays a central role in influencing, if not determining, educational outcomes. It was possible, from what the young men said, to trace Bourdieu's claims about the primary habitus of the home and its role in establishing sets of conscious and unconscious practices around the importance of education and its capacity for social mobility (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) argued that the primary habitus of the home could be transformed into a secondary habitus; specifically he was referring to children's experiences in educational settings. Schools and teachers in particular can influence students' educational experiences. The young men I interviewed had benefitted enormously from their education, most of them had had a teacher or a number of teachers who had inspired them and their experiences at university had imbued them with confidence. However, my participants all reported some negative accounts of working class young men's school-based experiences. One point that emerges from all the accounts of stereotyping and low aspirations of teachers for working class males, is that it is the responsibility of schools to take action (Sutton Trust here, 2011). Schools

can have a powerful role in transforming the primary habitus of students through exposing them to alternative experiences and through encouraging, mentoring and supporting this group of young people. However, while this approach has been embedded in the rhetoric of policy approaches towards the education of white working class young people (Sergeant, 2009), from what my participants had to say, not much had changed in their view and in their experiences.

In this chapter, I have concentrated on some of the reasons that account for the long-standing underachievement of white working class males as detailed by my participants. Throughout this thesis I have deployed a Bourdieusian theoretical framework as well as using the conceptual approach derived from the concept of dominant masculine hegemony (Connell, 2005). These complementary approaches have been applied in order to connect my data to existing knowledge as well as to suggest some significant variables in the area of young white male working class under-achievement. In this section I have detailed some of the Bourdieusian inflected issues that need further consideration. Now I want to return briefly to issues of masculinity.

What the literature suggests (from Willis' work in 1977 to Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) is that some forms of cultures of masculinity have been identified as simultaneously compensating for but contributing towards the educational failure of white working class men (Power et al, 2003). From what my participants said, if the primary habitus espouses 'doing what Dad does' and this occupation does not require any form of post-compulsory education, then some working class males may be less likely to be pro-education. However, some of my participants believed that there was another related problem

because, in their home areas, many traditional male occupations have vanished (for example, coal mining or ship building) Thus some young men were being exposed to dominant forms of masculinity that were counter-productive as the jobs they privileged are no longer available.

It could be argued that success in sport has often been regarded by some young white working class men as a substitute for academic success. Other young men, such as some of those in my study, appear to have a form of 'flexible masculinity' (Gee 2013) that has allowed them to use their sporting capital and convert it into academic capital. These young men have a primary habitus that has enabled them to be academically successful while at the same time working positively with some versions of dominant masculinities. As Gee (2013) suggests, they have bent the codes of masculinity and diversified the available options of masculinity, they have produced a flexible masculinity.

All the young men in my study saw themselves as more independent, with a broader outlook on life, and they were leaving university secure in the knowledge that they had successfully broken the mould. However, while they had all achieved against the odds, they identified the dual roles of family and school aspirations and support as fundamental to their success. As they all pointed out, the school has the potential to interrupt and transform the primary habitus to influence the academic achievement of white working class males; the tragedy is that in their experience, this is still just not happening in enough schoolrooms.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions: Drawing My Study Together

I think everyone changes at university.

*You become your own person, you
become independent, you know what
you enjoy doing, you learn how to do
things your own way... Adam.*

Introduction

In this final chapter I start by revisiting the intentions of my research. I also revisit the thorny matter of what is meant by the term ‘working class’. I then reconsider the theoretical concepts that frame my research and detail the major findings from this work in relation to the three research questions that framed the thesis and my core findings. Then I consider the possible impacts that my identity might have had in terms of data collection and analysis. I conclude with short discussion of some of the key policy implications that arise from my study and suggest some possible areas of future research in the area of the educational achievement of white working class males.

Research Intentions

I wanted to contribute to an area of educational research that is often considered from a negative perspective, white working class males’ academic (under) achievement. Thus I approached this contentious issue from a more positive position, that is, from the perspectives of a small group of white working class males who were academically successful. My research took the form of semi-structured interviews giving the participants the opportunity to

tell their life stories, their experiences of home and family, of the English educational system, the academic successes they achieved and their career aspirations.

My study highlights the factors that contributed to the academic success of the young men and the hurdles that they had to overcome to achieve this success. These young men worked hard at achieving their aims. For them it was a day to day and year to year commitment; they experienced disappointments but they did not let these get in the way of their aim of 'going to uni' (Frank). Personal attributes play a part in the life stories of the young men in my study and, as with the sample in Reay et al's (2009) study, my participants showed qualities of perseverance and motivation as well as good study skills. The young men in my study were agentic in their educational progression. They have, through sheer determination, succeeded academically; as agents they have moved fields (Bourdieu, 1990b).

Since the mid-twentieth century up to the present day education in the UK has operated through a doxa of meritocracy, meaning that agents act 'as if their position in the field has depended solely on individual effort, rather than being significantly constructed through hereditary advantages' (Thomson, 2010, p. 13). The young men in my study did not have 'hereditary advantages' but arguably they have slipped through the net while society continues by and large to reproduce itself (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014). They reported that while they did work hard to achieve their academic success, their attainments were due to a constellation of factors ranging from a nurturing family environment through to perseverance and resilience (Dweck, 2006;

Duckworth & Carlson, 2013). They recognised that their academic success was attributable to more than a meritocratic educational system selecting them for academic advancement.

Complexities of class

Before I turn to the research questions and my findings, I want to return to the vexed matter of social class. As discussed in Chapter One and Three, the term 'class' is difficult to define precisely because it does not reflect any observable attributes, unlike other forms of social stratification such as, ethnicity, age and gender (Stevenson & Lang, 2010). Consequently, there is a lack of consensus as to how it should be understood and measured (Bottero, 2009). In my study, by agreeing to participate, all my participants identified as being working class.

The reasons given by the young men in my study for so categorising themselves included their parents' occupations, the level of their parent's academic qualifications and income, where they lived and the schools they had attended.

In the last interview I asked the thirteen young men, who were still involved, about any welfare support they had received; nine said that they had been entitled to FSM's; ten had received the EMA in the sixth form and twelve were receiving maintenance grants at university. When I checked the ACORN UK postcode categories (CACI, 2014) I found that three of the young men's families lived in the lowest category (5) classified as 'Urban Adversity', five of the families lived in category 4 described as 'Financially Stretched' and the others lived in category 3 or above which is described as 'Comfortable Communities'.

While all my participants may have described themselves as working class they appeared to come from different *fractions* of the working class. 'Class makes a

difference not just in terms of inter-class differences but also in terms of intra-class difference' (Reay, 1998, p. 522). It is the degree of economic hardship and poverty that differentiates these fractions of class (Maguire, 1997).

Table 8:2 Acorn UK postcode categories

Category	Number of Participants
Five – Urban Adversity	3
Four – Financially Stretched	5
Three – Comfortable Communities	3
Two – Rising Prosperity	2

In addition to economic disparities, in-group differences between people of the same broad socio-economic group are sometimes to do with their capacity to access various '*capitals*' (Bourdieu, 1990a); within the same class there are differences in available '*capitals*'. Many of the young men in my study had mothers who understood that education paves the way for social mobility. As Leon, whose family home was in category five of the ACORN UK postcode categories, told me:

...although my family are working class technically, in terms of their interest and culture, they are not what you typically associate with working class people. And I kind of think that culturally we are probably middle class.

Previous studies (Jackson & Marsden, 1966; Ball et al., 2002) suggest that many working class children who access higher education come from what they called the 'upper echelons' of the working class. However being in the lowest (Acorn) category did not prevent two of my participants completing undergraduate degrees at elite universities and one completing his undergraduate studies at a modern university. Thus, the point I wish to highlight here is that class

categorisations may be more complex than they appear; class-inflected research needs to take account of the subtle intra-class differences that exist.

Theoretical Perspectives Reconsidered

‘Theory is about the connections among phenomena, a story about why acts, events, structure, and thought occur. Theory emphasises the nature of causal relationships... ’ (Sutton and Staw, 1995, p. 378). Thus, the choice to work with particular theories or bodies of work is based on a decision about fitness for purpose and a capacity to undertake what Sutton and Staw call ‘why work’. As I have already detailed (see Chapter Three) in analysing factors to do with family circumstances, educational choice making and cultural patterns, the work of Bourdieu seemed highly applicable. His work is best known for its focus on social class reproduction and he developed a conceptual toolkit to identify the ways in which social reproduction actually takes place (Grenfell, 2008).

Bourdieuian concepts of habitus, field and capital helped me begin to tease out and explain the factors that enabled the young men in my study to experience academic success. Not only did Bourdieu’s approach lend me a distinctive way in which to frame my work, it also gave me a language and a conceptual array from which to work.

However, while Bourdieu’s work proved very useful in my mapping of the factors involved in my participants’ experiences such as shifts in primary habitus and the role of field, the account that I have presented in this thesis is not one of straightforward social reproduction. My findings suggest that there are a number of key factors that together contribute to the academic success of the young men in my study enabling them to experience social mobility and

these are summarised later in this chapter. Thus, there is a need to ask if Bourdieu's work explains how social transformations occur.

In my data it was evident that my sample (albeit a small and partial sample) had all done well in their educational trajectories. They were all from working class communities but had achieved educational success against the odds. In relation to my Bourdieusian approach, this transformation was effected because of shifts in field (sixth form provision; significant teachers) as well as in the primary habitus. As Hilgers (2009) convincingly argues, habitus is not a deterministic concept. He argues that individuals cannot choose their patterns of socialisation and that adaptations to field occur almost 'instinctively' but that 'there is no coercion that imposes our actions on us' (p. 747). My findings support this view and suggest the need for a sophisticated and complex understanding of habitus and the habitus-field interplay. Indeed, this is exactly what Reay (2004b) called for in *'It's All Becoming a Habitus': Beyond the Habitual Use of Habitus in Educational Research'*.

The second theoretical approach I decided to use related to theories of dominant cultures of masculinity that were/are in circulation. My literature review revealed that some forms of masculinities featured as an important factor in white working class young men's academic underperformance

As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 832) explain, dominant cultures of masculinity that asserted superiority over women and rejected what was seen as 'female' 'was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man'. As I detailed in Chapter One and

Seven, many researchers have argued that in celebrating a particular version of masculinity, men have rejected an educational self and have valorised other aspects such as sports, physical strength etc. Thus, this approach also offered a useful way into conceptualising the relationship between white working class young men and educational achievement. It seemed potentially valuable to explore the influence of any hegemonic forms of masculinity in the lives of a sample of academically successful young white working class men.

My findings revealed that discourses of dominant masculinities caused some issues for some of the young men in my study who were sometimes 'othered' by their peers and referred to as being 'geeks'. This was particularly the case in the compulsory phase of secondary school. Other men in my sample seemed to steer their way through these cultures of masculinity; they coped by being active and successful sports participants while remaining pro-school and keeping up with their workloads.

In theoretical terms, while Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) stress that not all men perform dominant/hegemonic forms of masculinity, they claim that all males are subjected to its constraints. My participants were certainly aware of the effects and influences of these cultures, particularly on other young men with whom they were at school. However, it could be argued that there may be a degree of reification in the literature on hegemonic masculinities that sidelines those who Ball et al. (2000) call the 'ordinary' boys? Are there perhaps more 'geeks' or 'ordinary' boys than is sometimes imagined? Are the young men in my study 'ordinary' boys who have adopted what Gee (2014) refers to as 'flexible masculinities' and adapted their own masculinities to sustain their

sense of self while at school and university and now post-university?

Research Questions

- RQ1. *How do academically successful white working class young men account for their achievements?*

In my effort to understand the relationship between education and social class I have drawn on the work of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, in particular his concepts of 'cultural' and 'social capital', 'habitus' and 'field', to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the choices these young men made.

Habitus is structured by one's past and present circumstances which include family upbringing and life experiences (Bourdieu, 1990b). The habitus of my participants provided them with a positive attitude to schooling. Each of these young men explained that their mother was important in providing the security and support that enabled each one of them to engage with confidence in education. However while these young men embraced academics many of their siblings did not (see Table 4.2 in Chapter Four). Most of the siblings of my participants chose not to engage with education although they had arguably been exposed to the same capital and habitus as their brothers. Is this because habitus is in fact complicated, situated and specific to the individual?

Could there have been shifts in habitus over time because a family's financial situation changed? This was the case for Craig when his mother met a new partner who provided a more secure financial position for the family enabling him to attend a private grammar school for the sixth form. That being said, Craig's only brother chose to leave school at sixteen and undertake an

apprenticeship even though he had the opportunity to continue his education. These findings speak to a habitus that is complicated, time specific and situated; a habitus that is *uniquely* individual. So while the 'structure', that is to say the habitus, generates within the individual, sets of 'perceptions, appreciations and practices' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 53), *agency* as well as changes in the habitus (such as additional finances) permit the restructuring of the primary habitus.

All but one of my cohort had experienced academic success early in their schooling. Most of the cohort had enjoyed their primary school years and many referred to teachers in those early years who had offered encouragement. They appeared to have developed positive learner identities through these early school experiences that remained with them. Had the young men in my study been exposed to the cultural capital of their teachers through the positive interactions they enjoyed with them? According to Bourdieu (1990b) cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture of society and its way of being. He also maintained that academia at all levels is a middle class formation and difficult for working class children to succeed in. But my working class participants appeared to have acquired the social and cultural capital that enabled them to experience academic success early in their academic careers and navigate their way successfully through the English education system.

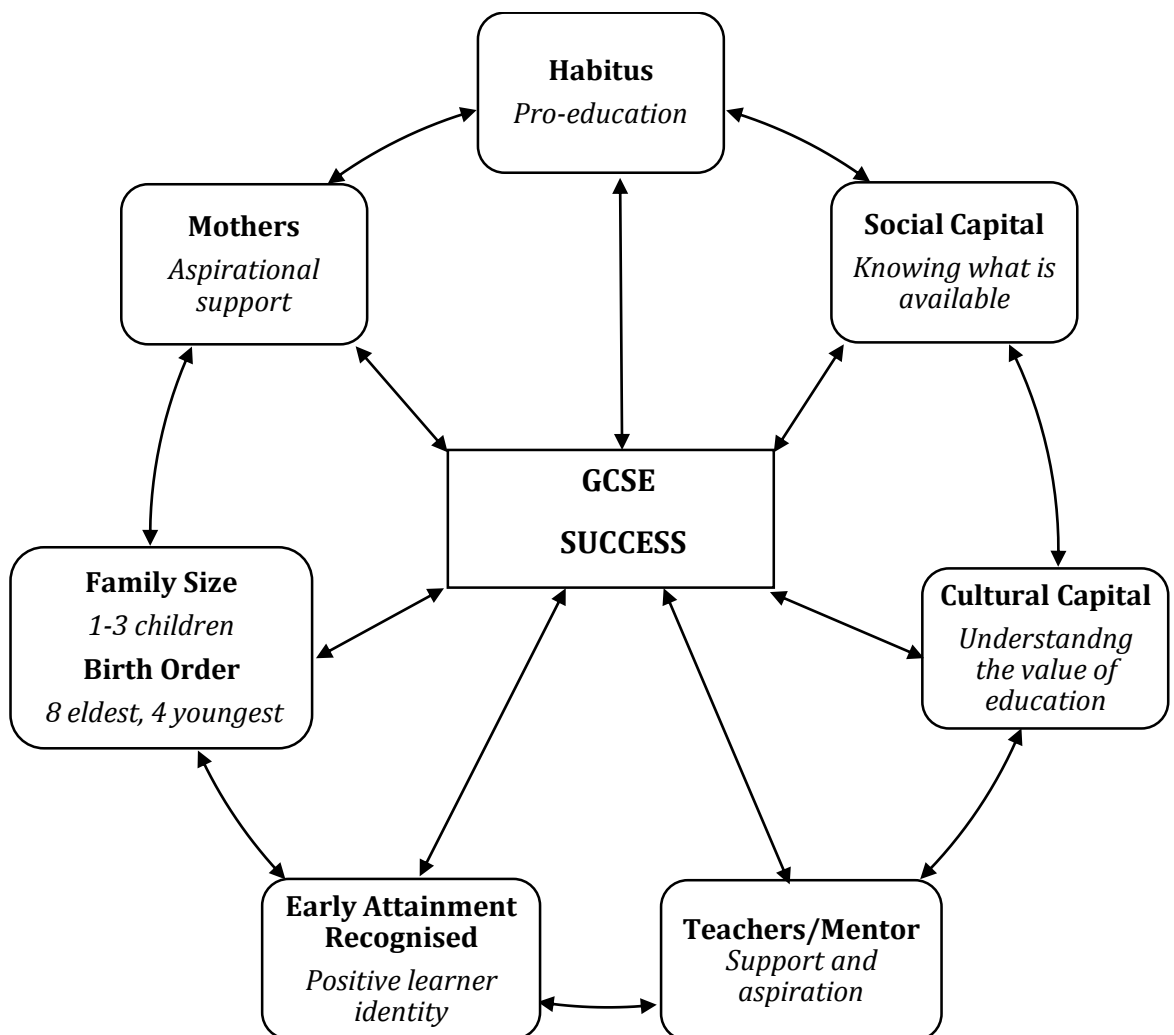
It was not only teachers who provided access to additional social and cultural capital for the participants in my study. The families of my participants had access to 'capitals' that enabled their sons to be academically successful. The families my participants came from wanted their sons to do well academically.

Jackson & Marsden (1966) found that one third of the young people in their study who went on to grammar schools had parents who had grown up in middle class families or had a grandparent who had been middle class. They suggested that these parents may have known about the advantages of going to grammar school and then continuing onto higher education. They referred to this group of families as the 'sunken middle class' (p. 67). In my own study several of the young men were being raised by a single parent – their mother – so it could be that the economic situation these women found themselves in was the reason that they and their sons were categorized as working class. For example, Graham explained that he never really felt that he fitted in with the other children in his school or the people in his neighbourhood:

...I think like always feeling a bit sort of outside of people who lived locally who had done the same job for like fifty years and read the Daily Mail and this, and, (I) never really like understand that mindset much and always wanted something different to that to some degree.

Some of my participants' mothers may have had middle class connections which might have underpinned their positive orientation to education. This is not an area that I covered in my research but interviewing the mothers (and fathers) of my participants and accessing this type of information could be a fruitful follow-up study.

Diagram 8:1 Factors that contributed to the academic success at GCSE



Most of the young men in my study reported mixed experiences at secondary school. The institutional habitus of some of their schools was not academic; however most of the participants reported that they had at least one teacher who inspired them to succeed and all of them successfully completed their GCSEs. This was a critical accomplishment because without academic qualifications at this point of transition, academic success, as measured by

access to higher education, is much more difficult to achieve. As can be seen from Diagram 8:1 there were a number of core factors that contributed to this success at GCSE level.

Beyond compulsory schooling at age sixteen, nine young men chose the traditional academic route of 'A' levels or IB and six chose to undertake a BTEC in sport. The young men who at this stage of their academic careers chose to study for a BTEC qualification instead of the traditional 'A' level subjects were limiting the number of universities they could apply to as it is generally only the modern universities that accept BTEC qualifications. Did the young men choosing the BTEC route at age 16 realize this? Were they fully informed of the consequences of this choice by their school or further education institution?

I did not ask the young men these questions directly, but six of the seven young men studying Sports Science chose to undertake a BTEC in sport because they enjoyed sport and wanted to make a career for themselves in the sporting arena. Some of the young men believed that they would not have achieved the necessary grades had they followed the traditional A level route (see Chapter Four). Thus, they made what was a rational choice to undertake a BTEC in their endeavours to attend university to study in the sports science area. Whether they fully appreciated the longer term consequences of this subject/qualification choice-making in relation to labour market opportunities is debatable.

On entering the sixth form, the participants in my study found that they were 'attuned to the *doxa*, the unwritten "rules of the game" underlying practices within that field' (Maton, 2008, p. 57), the field of the sixth form. Discipline

problems were no longer an issue and they found themselves with like-minded pro-school students. All the young men believed that choosing to continue their schooling beyond GCSE level was a signal that they intended to go on to higher education. Many of them spent three years in the sixth form in their efforts to achieve entrance to university. These young men showed what Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly (2007) describe as 'grit,' the 'perseverance and passion for long-term goals' (p. 1087).

- R2. *How and in what ways do academically successful white working class young men interpret their university experiences?*

In Chapter Five I explored the university experiences of the young men who had participated in my study and I considered the possible limitations of choosing to explore the experiences of young men attending two modern and two elite universities. As I have explained (see Chapter Three) it might have been useful to have included a broader set of HE providers in an attempt to avoid a binaried approach in terms of the fields of these types of universities. However, after redesigning my study (see Chapter Three) my focus was not with the 'type' of university attended or the subject studied; my research interest lay with the individual participants and how they had achieved academic success *against* the odds.

On entering university, all the young men in my study reported feeling that to some extent they were 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), a case of habitus and social field not matching. When habitus and social field disconnect, the individual may experience apprehension. This was the case for my participants who initially all reported experiencing difficulties in 'negotiating

the (largely unwritten) 'rules of the game' of university life' (Read et al., 2003, p. 261). While the culture within the two types of universities attended by my participants was somewhat different, and each institution has its own distinctive 'academic culture' (Read et al, 2003, p. 261), this 'culture' had to be negotiated by the students at both types of university and they did not always have the cultural capital necessary to make this change seamlessly.

There were 'new rules of the game' for my participants to learn on entering university. This caused some initial dissonance for the young men but they adapted to this new institutional habitus, changing, even transforming their lives (Reay, 2004b) to some extent, over time. As Bourdieu (1999b) asserts, habitus is not deterministic and the individual can indeed take action to change this.

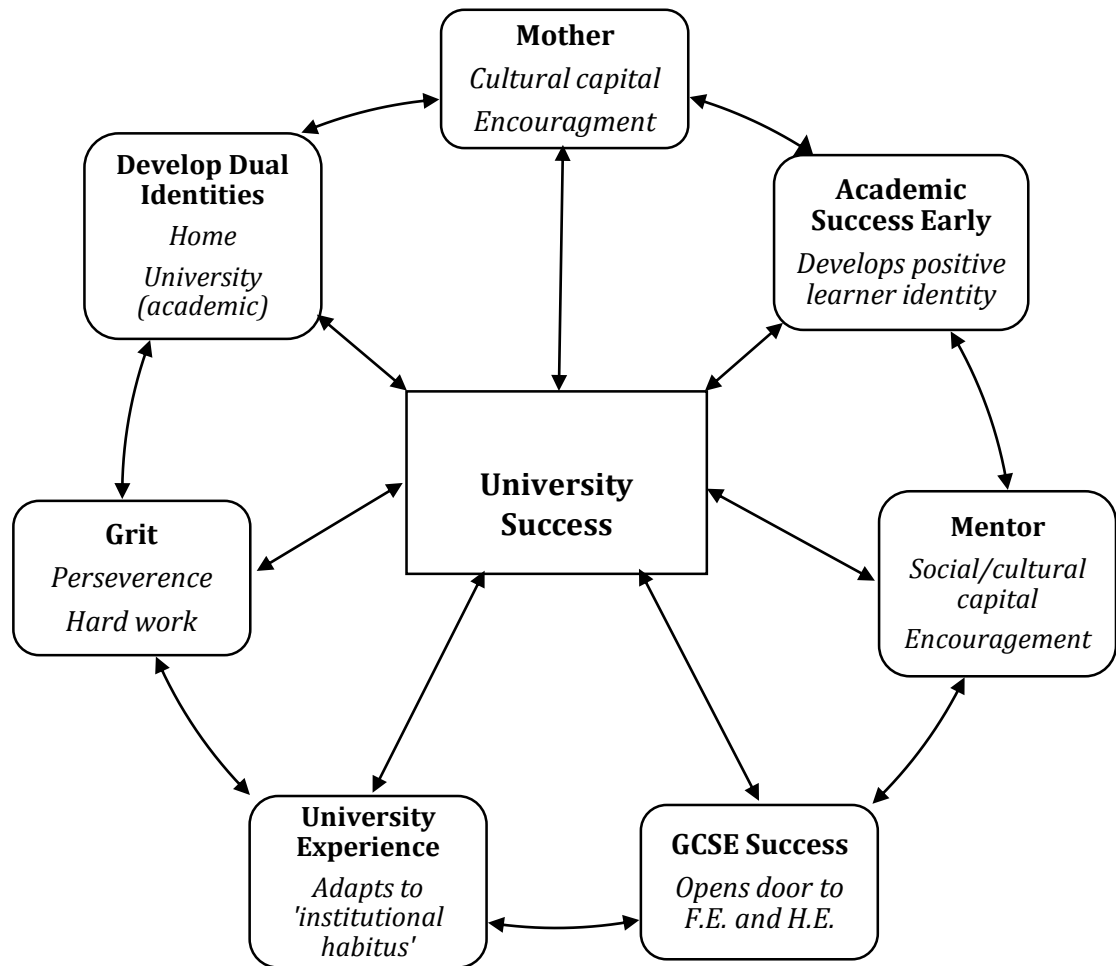
However, as I have detailed in Chapter Five, my participants reported some differences in their university experiences and here I want to briefly highlight the pedagogic contrasts they reported. The men attending the modern universities found that university life was not so all-encompassing. Contact hours were fewer than in the elite universities, written work was only required at the end of each semester, their social and sporting activities mostly took place outside of university, some of the young men lived at home and all but one of the others lived in accommodation outside of the university. The participants at the modern universities appeared to find it more difficult to establish what the 'rules of the game' were and therefore accessing these rules took longer than for their counterparts at the elite universities (Crozier & Reay, 2011). It was not unusual for some of them to suddenly discover they had essays to

complete within days or hours of realizing this fact. Many of them did not organise their workload over the course of the semester and this resulted in some poor work being handed in and, at times, the need to re-sit units of study. The young men at the modern university also had the belief that they had to sort out their own problems (Addis & Mahalik, 2003) which resulted in many of them not doing as well academically as they might have done in a different institution.

There were also differences in terms of my participant's orientation to the labour market. The men who had attended the modern universities seemed much less focussed on their future careers than those attending the elite universities. Very few of the young men at the modern universities had availed themselves of the student services at their universities. Could this be another example where males regard help-seeking as 'feminine' and to be avoided (Addis & Mahalik, 2003)? This question was not discussed in the interviews. Despite this all my participants, who had planned to go into employment immediately on graduating, had found work.

The elite universities in my sample provided connections that the young men could tap into to find suitable work experience in organisations, such as law firms, the civil service and the like, while they were at university. This often led to future professional employment opportunities. These participants had access to the wider social capital and networks of the university which enabled them to access the experiences necessary to secure professional employment on graduation.

Diagram 8:2 Factors that contributed to the university success of the study participants



- *RQ 3. What reasons (if any) do academically successful white working class males give for the under-achievement of many of their peers?*

What do they think could make an educational difference?

Schools function to teach and socialize children, and Bourdieu believes that schools teach and socialize children in *distinct* ways using a certain type of language, the ways and language of the middle classes (Schubert, 2008). He adds that some in-school practices may act as forms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984). 'Pedagogic action is objectively a symbolic violence to the

extent to which it is an imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p.5).

Some children who come from working class backgrounds may feel alienated in school as the culture of school maybe unfamiliar to them. Those without the necessary capital are not only alienated but made to feel inferior and are less likely to succeed in the school environment (Bourdieu, 1991). This:

misrecognition of social privilege as natural superiority in this way serves to solidify that privilege and, for members of subordinated groups, exacerbate symbolic violence and intensify social suffering (Schubert, 2008, p. 190).

From the perspectives of the participants in my study, the school experiences of many white working class males are less than ideal. Many of my cohort identified setting in both primary and secondary school as a negative experience for those put into the lower sets. They thought that once children were put in the lower sets their own aspirations as well as those of their parents and teachers were dampened, with many boys giving up on education very early in their academic careers. My participants suggested that many white working class young men like themselves believed that teachers held pre-conceived ideas about them and saw them as lacking aspirations and not interested in academic pursuits. As Rollock (2006) and Archer (2008b) found in their studies (see Chapter One), and the young men in my study suggested, some teachers thought that certain types of students were not capable of experiencing academic success. Many of my cohort also reported that teachers did not fully explain the benefits of education and the opportunities that

education can provide.

Some school practices, as reported by some of my participants (see Chapter Seven) make for sobering reading and need to be addressed. These practices amount to what Bourdieu termed 'symbolic violence'. The misrecognition of social privilege, Bourdieu contends, is why social inequality continues to be reproduced. The young men in my study identified and *recognised* what went on in schools and how this appeared to cement white working class boys into a subordinate position (Archer 2008b; Ingram, 2009). There may have been misrecognition on the part of the teachers but there was little misrecognition on the part of the participants in my study. They were clear about what they had seen and in some cases experienced themselves.

These arguments are confirmed by Reay, who in drawing on data from three of her ESRC projects, explained: 'educational experiences can elevate and centre, or deflate and marginalize students' sense of self' (2009, p. 23). She argues that most working class children have the latter educational experiences and that working class boys in particular manifest 'a sense of powerlessness and educational worthlessness' (2009, p. 25). Reay suggests that in the UK the working class are seen 'as a social group with no value' (2009, p. 27) and what is needed is to attribute a positive meaning to the term 'workingclassness'.

Core findings

University did make a difference

There is some criticism that attending certain types of university and doing certain types of courses is a waste of time and money and that there are not enough jobs for graduates and the like (Allen, 2013; Higher Education Statistics

Agency, 2014). This is not an area that I wish to explore except to say that this was not the case for the young men I interviewed. As already stated, all the young men I interviewed reported that they had benefited from their university experiences, and even if the young men who attended modern universities find employment in jobs that do not require an undergraduate degree, they will find themselves more employable than those applying for the same job without those academic qualifications. At the same time the young men in my study will benefit from the knowledge and confidence they have all gained from attending university.

Teachers matter

Most of the young men had had the benefit of some caring teachers who encouraged them academically. Their experiences at school left them with positive learner identities. But not all children develop positive learner identities and there appear to be some practices that the young men in my study highlighted as potential dampeners on the academic aspirations of white working class males as detailed above. They also thought that information about further education and higher education opportunities were in some cases limited.

Mothers are fundamental in providing security, stability and encouragement to their children

In my study eight of the young men were brought up by their mothers and it appeared to be predominantly mothers who were instrumental in their sons' continued engagement with education. Mothers provided their sons with the emotional capital necessary to engage with and remain in education when many

of their peers were distracted. This is not to say that in all families it was only mothers who provided this emotional support. As documented in earlier chapters, fathers and other members of the extended families also provided the support necessary for my participants to continue in their endeavours to complete a university degree.

The young men themselves were 'gritty'

The young men in my study persisted when most of their peers gave up. They understood the value of education and they were prepared to work when others were 'playing'. Often after school my participants were doing homework when their peers were engaging in other activities. University proved even more difficult – coming to terms with the institutional habitus of the university and all that that entailed, as well as living away from home and working hard to achieve the dream of a university undergraduate degree, did not come easily to all the participants in my study. Economic constraints had caused problems for most of them, even for those at the elite universities where bursaries are more freely available. Many of these young men's home friends did not understand why the participants continued with their education and apparently sometimes taunted them about it. They have had to re-form their identities and they have done this well appearing to moving seamlessly between home and university.

The role of the school

So what can be done for other white working class boys? While schools cannot be held responsible for what goes on beyond the school gates and schools have children for a limited time, the effect schools have on children cannot and should not be underestimated. Perhaps these working class children suffer symbolic violence at school, perhaps through their teachers' lack of

understanding of the social backgrounds of the children under their care. On entering school it needs to be acknowledged that not all students will have the capital the school requires and it is incumbent on the school to make the difference.

Schools and teachers need to be aware of the consequences of labelling and grouping children, and they need to understand the possible effect this can have on the aspirations of the children themselves, their parents and their teachers. Bad behaviour needs to be dealt with as soon as it happens but the question needs to be asked as to why the child is misbehaving. Is the child struggling with the school work or is the work conversely too easy for the child? Perhaps there are issues at home that the school cannot deal with but knowing that these problems exist is useful information.

Teachers should never underestimate the influence they have on children and need to remember that a positive comment by a teacher stays with a child for a life time, as does a negative one. As my participants acknowledged, we all remember the good teachers we have had and equally we remember the ones we thought were not so good.

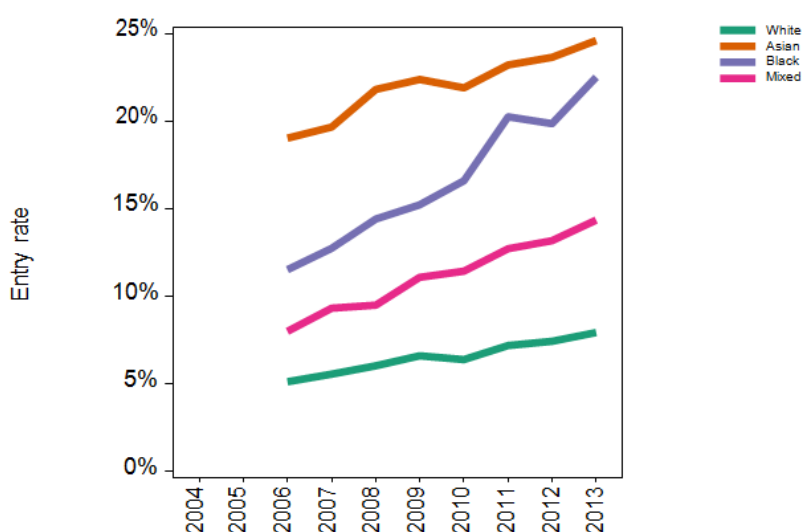
Limitations of the study

I now return to some of the key limitations of my study (see also Chapter Three where I have dealt extensively with the issue of the type of university attended by my participants). Here I want to revisit the difficulties I encountered in finding participants and the problem of retention. One reason the recruitment problem may have arisen is because the actual number of white working class males attending university is not very large. In 2013, 7.9% of white children

(both male and female) on FSM entered university. In numerical terms: 220,000 18 year olds entered university in 2013. Of this number, **3200** were white working class males on FSM and of this 3200 some **45** white working class males went to Oxbridge (UCAS 2014).

Graph 8:1 University entry rates for English 18 year old former state school students on FSM's by ethnicity (Source: UCAS, 2014).

Entry rates for English 18 year old former state school pupils who were in receipt of free school meals (FSM) by selected ethnic group



Graph 8:1 shows the university entrance rates for 18 year old former state school students who were in receipt of free school meals by ethnicity for the years 2004 through to 2013. White FSM children consistently have the lowest university entrance rates (UCAS, 2014). These statistics verify the fact that the numbers of white working class students attending university in England are very small.

Retention was always going to be an issue as my study was to be conducted over a two year period and involved the participants being interviewed three times. However, retention itself is a class-related issue with there being much higher withdrawal rates among working class students attending modern

universities (Reay, 2012). In the light of this evidence, the loss of two recruits was perhaps to be expected (see Chapter Five).

Although I had lost two recruits over the two years, I did interview the thirteen remaining participants three times and I had a wealth of data to work with. I did not think the loss of two participants would impact my findings unduly and I felt that the potential benefits of exploring this under-researched area by revealing the untold stories behind the academic success of these white males from a working class background outweighed the limitations of the sample.

Positionality and reflexivity

In my work I was conscious that 'reflexive practice should constitute a process of uncovering/recognizing the difference your differences make' (Reay, 1996, p. 443). I recognised that the participants in my study may have provided me with responses that they thought I, as a white middle class, mid-aged woman and mother may have wished to hear. I therefore spent some time speaking with the young men about general topics before the questioning began with the aim of putting them at ease and making them aware that I had no preconceived notions about what information I would receive from them. One advantage I had as a researcher was that of being Australian and in this way I was not necessarily perceived as being part of the British class system.

During the study I became immersed in the field, generating data that I felt was reflexive of the 'real worlds' of my participants. Like Reay (1996) I found myself feeling emotional at times when listening to some of the lived experiences of my participants. Throughout the period I was collecting data and beyond I was conscious of the need to be reflexive (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) because 'to

leave one's thoughts in a state of unthought (impense) is to condemn oneself to nothing more than the instrument of that which one claims to think' (p. 238). I was conscious of my positionality in my research. I was conscious that I had come to the research with preconceived ideas but I did constantly reflect on these and I believe that I have let the participants in my study tell their own stories.

One issue that occurred which I had not anticipated was that I found myself emotionally moved when listening to some of the lived experiences of my participants. Could I be truly reflexive and ignore this? I found myself, like Ellis (2003), embracing this emotion as one of my experiences of being a researcher. Ellis (1991) refers to an 'emotional sociology' that involves 'consciously and reflexively feeling for ourselves, our subjects, our topics of study and invoking those feelings in our readers' (p. 126). She goes on to suggest that ethnographers should convey those emotions experienced when hearing the real life stories of the participants. This I have tried to do in my thesis.

Further possible research

Given the concern about the academic underachievement of many white working class boys I argue that more research into the under researched field of academically successful white working class young males is warranted. Perhaps the study of academically successful white working class girls is also a field open for more exploration as in general white working class girls too under-perform at GCSE level. Data shows that they perform only slightly better than white working class boys (see Graph 1:1). My argument is that in teasing out the factors that account for success, it may be possible to isolate some aspects that

can be taken up by educational providers in order to make more of a difference. Here I would include in-school categorisations and labelling practices that need to change. I would also include the need for more academic support services in universities.

Another area of research that could be usefully explored involves the siblings of the young men in my study, specifically the level of education and types of work they pursued and the reasons behind their decisions. Many of the siblings of my participants left school at the earliest opportunity. Why did these siblings not engage with education when their brothers did and how does the academic success of their brother impact on them? This finding raises theoretical questions about habitus as being a 'durable' structure. From my findings it appears to me that the participants in my research have transformed their habitus, this may have occurred because of the field changes these young men have experienced.

Perhaps one of the most important areas for further research relates to the need to continue to chart and document (statistically and qualitatively) the numbers of working class students who make it to university and what happens to them once they get there. If we continue to live in a period of austerity and experience massive financial cuts-backs to public expenditure, it may be that working class white males will continue to be under-represented in higher education.

Policy implications

My study does not offer a policy panacea to raise the educational achievement of all white working class boys. There are some individual factors that

contributed to my participants' academic success which cannot be provided by the state or by schools. There are however some factors that are more susceptible to education policy actions. These have been explored in my study and include: raising awareness of the symbolic violence that surrounds white working class boys that often goes unnoticed in schools; the discontinuation of setting and streaming of children as this is detrimental to the learning achievements of those who find themselves in the lower sets or streams (setting and streaming also appears to be of limited value to those in the top set or stream); ensuring that all children develop positive learner identities early in their schooling careers; raising teachers educational aspirations for white working class boys; providing working class students with a fuller knowledge of the education system. This is information that they may not have been exposed to, such as, the options available and the impact of studying some subjects in the sixth form which may limit university choices.

One factor that had made a difference in the past was the EMA; some moves to restore this funding to support poorer children could be a useful policy lever for reducing the social exclusion that many working class young people experience.

The wider relevance of this study

The subject of white working class males' underachievement has become one of the key foci of education debate in England in recent times, for example the House of Commons Education Committee Enquiry (2014). Most of the young men in my study came from economically deprived backgrounds but their mothers were able to support their sons' academic endeavours. Often parents from such backgrounds do not have the time or the will to provide academic

support for a multitude of reasons associated with a lack of economic resources. The government's role should be to ensure that in modern Britain no family finds themselves in a situation where survival is a daily struggle. Those in our society who find themselves facing such economic hardships are in no position to spend time promoting the educational endeavours of their children. The school plays a vital role in ensuring that the child develops a positive learner identity through their school career and that academic expectations for the child are maintained. The university has a role to play in ensuring that first generation university students are armed with the necessary tools to make a successful transition from school and home to university, as well as, equipping these first generation university students for the work place. My study then is of relevance to schools, universities and the government.

I close with a quote from one of the thirteen quite remarkable young men I interviewed:

I think more than anything, university is empowering for someone like me because it has confirmed and expanded what I always thought was maybe possible. Absolutely more than anything, (what) I have learnt here is empowerment. Really, real sense of empowerment. You can do anything, you can be anyone. But it gives you a way like nothing else can, like I say, the contacts, the people and the things you pick up here, here and everywhere, you pick up tiny little things when you mention something, someone will know someone and this what you don't have, this is what is the biggest

problem for me, is that you do not have the social capital
if you don't come to somewhere like this (Craig).

The young men in my study persisted in their quest to obtain a university education, they showed true grit and they benefited enormously from their education. I hope this thesis does them justice and that it goes some way to helping parents, teachers, those in higher education institutions and in government come to a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the academic success of young white working class men.

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Appendices

Appendix A: NS-SEC analytic classes, operational categories and sub-categories

Analytic Classes	Operational categories and sub-categories classes	
1.1	L1	Employers in large establishments
	L2	Higher managerial and administrative occupations
1.2	L3	Higher professional occupations
		L3.1 'Traditional' employees
		L3.2 'New' employees
		L3.3 'Traditional' self-employed
		L3.4 'New' self-employed
2	L4	Lower professional and higher technical occupations
		L4.1 'Traditional' employees
		L4.2 'New' employees
		L4.3 'Traditional' self-employed
		L4.4 'New' self-employed
	L5	Lower managerial and administrative occupations
	L6	Higher supervisory occupations
3	L7	Intermediate occupations
		L7.1 Intermediate clerical and administrative occupations
		L7.2 Intermediate sales and service occupations
		L7.3 Intermediate technical and auxiliary occupations

		L7.4 Intermediate engineering occupations
4	L8	Employers in small organisations
		L8.1 Employers in small establishments in industry, commerce, services etc.
		L8.2 Employers in small establishments in agriculture
	L9	Own account workers
		L9.1 Own account workers (non-professional)
		L9.2 Own account workers (agriculture)
5	L10	Lower supervisory occupations
	L11	Lower technical occupations
		L11.1 Lower technical craft occupations
		L11.2 Lower technical process operative occupations
6	L12	Semi-routine occupations
		L12.1 Semi-routine sales occupations
		L12.2 Semi-routine service occupations
		L12.3 Semi-routine technical occupations
		L12.4 Semi-routine operative occupations
		L12.5 Semi-routine agricultural occupations
		L12.6 Semi-routine clerical occupations
		L12.7 Semi routine childcare occupations
7	L13	Routine occupations
		L13.1 Routine sales and service occupations
		L13.2 Routine production occupations

		L13.3 Routine technical occupations
		L13.4 Routine operative occupations
		L13.5 Routine agricultural occupations
8	L14	Never worked and long-term unemployed
		L14.1 Never worked
		L14.2 Long-term unemployed
*	L15	Full-time students
*	L16	Occupations not stated or inadequately described
*	L17	Not classifiable for other reasons

Appendix B: The "Sutton 13 and Sutton 30"

In 2000, The Sutton Trust developed a list of 13 "most highly selective" British Universities. These universities are shown in blue in the table below.

In 2011, the Trust updated their methodology to take in the 30 "most highly selective" British Universities, which were "also the 30 most selective according to the Times University Guide" for the purpose of illustrating the relative number of students from poor backgrounds enrolled here against the rest of the institutions. These are, in alphabetical order:

University of Bath,	University of Manchester
University of Birmingham	University of Newcastle,
University of Bristol	University of Nottingham,
University of Cambridge,	University of Oxford,
Cardiff University,	University of Reading
Durham University	Royal Holloway,
University of Edinburgh	University of London
University of Exeter,	University of Sheffield,
University of Glasgow,	University of Southampton,
Imperial College,	University of St Andrews,
King's College London,	University of Strathclyde,
University of Lancaster,	University of Surrey,
University of Leeds,	University College London,
University of Leicester,	University of Warwick
University of Liverpool,	University of York
London School of Economics,	<i>(Sutton Trust, 2010, p.5)</i>

Appendix C: Recruitment Email

Circular email for use for recruitment of volunteers for study ref: REP(EM)/12/13-2 approved by KCL Research Ethics Committee. This project contributes to the College's role in conducting research and teaching research methods should you wish to contribute by participating. You are under no obligation to reply to this email, however if you so choose, participation in this research is voluntary.

Hello,

My name is Claire and I am currently studying towards an MPhil/PhD. My research project is focussing on academically successful white males of a working class background and the factors that have contributed to that success. I am interested in talking to **white males from a working class background** who are currently in the second year of their undergraduate degree and studying maths, physics or a humanities subject. I am hoping that some of you who fit this profile would be interested in participating in my research project. If you are willing to participate, the study will involve three one hour interviews. The first interview will take place in the second term of your second year, the second interview will be in the first term of your third year and the final interview will be in your final term after your final exams. The interviews will take place either at your university or at a public place of convenience. All participants' names will be changed and some details modified in my dissertation to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. If you want a copy of the finished study (e version) I will be delighted to supply you with one.

If you are interested in participating in this study or require more information please contact Claire Travers at email: mary-claire.travers@kcl.ac.uk

Appendix D: Interview Schedule 1

Academically Successful Males of a Working Class Background

Interview One

Aide Memoire for interviews with students

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I am currently undertaking a study that explores the factors that contribute towards the academic success of white males from a working class background. Everything that is said in the interview will be confidential and as I write up my research I will ensure all responses will remain anonymous. It would be very helpful if I can tape record the interview, unless there are any objections. If at any point you would like to terminate the interview please let me know. Thank you.

Objective:

To establish which common factors, if any, have contributed to the academic success of this cohort of young white men from a working class background, who are currently undertaking an undergraduate degree.

Questions:

1. Can you tell me a little about your family?

- Do you have any siblings?
- Where are you positioned in the family?
- What month were you born?
- Have any other members of your family attended university?
- Did you have a family member who encouraged you to do well at school?
- What educational qualifications do your parents have?
- What educational qualifications do your siblings have?
- What qualifications do your friends have?
- Did you partake in any extracurricular activities?
- Did you have access to books, the library, a computer, the internet?

2. Can you tell me a bit about your early schooling?

- Was it a positive experience?
- Did you feel that you experienced academic success?
- Was there any particular experience you remember as significant - that promoted your desire to succeed academically?
- Was/were there any teacher/s who had a positive impact on you?
Encouraged you academically?
- Did anyone else encourage you to succeed at school?

- Was there pressure from the other students to be a bit of a 'lad' instead of studying?
- Where did you attend primary school?
- How did you choose your secondary school?
- Did your friends attend the same secondary school?
- Were you in the 'Gifted and Talented' programme at school?

3. Can you tell me a bit about your secondary schooling?

- Was it a positive experience?
- Were you in the gifted and talented programme?
- Did you feel that you experienced academic success?
- Was there any particular experience you remember as significant - that promoted your desire to achieve academically
- Was/were there any teacher/s who had a positive impact on you?
Encouraged you academically?
- Did anyone else encourage you to succeed at school?
- Was there pressure from the other students to be a bit of a 'lad'?
- Where did you attend secondary school?
- What subjects did you study for your GCSEs?
- Did anyone influence your choice of subjects?
- Did anyone encourage you to stay on at school after you completed your GCSEs
- Did you stay at the same secondary school for A levels or did you go to a sixth form College?
- Did your friends stay on to do their A levels?
- What subjects did you choose to study for your A levels?
- Why did you choose those particular subjects?
- Did anyone influence your choice of subjects?

4. Can you tell me a bit about how you came to decide to attend university?

- When did the idea of going to university become an objective for you?
- Did anyone in particular encourage you?
- Did you receive any help or advice from anyone when filling in your UCAS form?
- Did you visit any universities while you were at school?
- If yes, what types of university did you visit – modern, pre-1992, red brick, elite?
- Did you receive any advice on which university to apply to?
- Why did you choose the particular university you are now attending?
- Why did you choose the course you are now studying?
- Did you receive any advice on subject choice?

- Have you found it a positive experience?
- Have you encountered any problems academically?
- Have you encountered any problems socially?
- How would you describe your first year at university?
- Have you enjoyed the subject you are reading?

5. What factor/s do you think contributed to your academic success?

- Did you have a mentor?
- Was there someone who inspired you to make you want to do well at school/university?
- Did your Mother have any influence on the academic decisions you made?
- Was there a teacher who motivated you to consider higher education?
- Was your success driven by fear of any kind – of failure, poverty?

6. Do you think that white working class boys under achieve academically?

- Why do you think this is?
- What would need to change for them to be encouraged to achieve academically?

7. What do you understand by success?

- Are you successful?

8. Have you given any thoughts to your future career?

9. Is there anything we have not covered in the interview that you'd like to add?

Thank you for your time and help. If you think of anything else please feel free to email me. I look forward to meeting you for the second interview next year.

Appendix E: Interview Schedule 2

Academically Successful Males of a Working Class Background

Interview Two

Aide Memoire for interviews with students

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for a second time. As you know I am currently undertaking a study that explores the factors that contribute towards the academic success of white males from a working class background.

Everything that is said in the interview will be confidential and as I write up my research I will ensure all responses will remain anonymous. It would be very helpful if I can tape record the interview, unless there are any objections. If at any point you would like to terminate the interview please let me know. Thank you.

Objective:

To establish which common factors, if any, have contributed to the academic success of this cohort of young white men from a working class background, who are currently undertaking an undergraduate degree.

Questions:

8. Can you tell me about your academic experience this year at university?

- Has it been a positive experience?
- How have you coped with the workload?
- Have you had any feedback for work submitted or exams sat?
- Have you had any problems academically?
- If so did you seek out or receive any help from tutors?
- Have you enjoyed your subject?

9. Can you tell me a bit about your social experiences this year at university?

- How have you found the social aspect of university life this year?
- Have you faced any particular issues? Any social class issues?
- If so did you seek out or receive any help from tutors?
- How do you feel you are coping with university life generally?

10. How would you describe your second year at university?

11. Can you tell me a bit about your work plans for the summer holidays

- Are you planning to work or do an internship that has relevance to the subject you are reading at university?

- Is the work/internship of relevance to your future career?
- At what company will you be working or doing the internship?
- How did you go about organising this?
- Did your tutors offer any guidance?
- If not working anywhere relevant to your subject, where are you planning to work?
- For how many weeks do you plan to work?
- Will you be living at home or at university or somewhere else while you work?
- Do you work in term time? If so what do you do? How many hours do you average a week?
- This year have you given any more thought to your plans post your undergraduate degree?

12. Do you have any plans to do any academic work/reading in the summer holidays?

13. Can you tell me a bit about how your family and friends are feeling about your being at university?

- How have your siblings reacted to your being at university?
- How have your home friends reacted to your being at university?
- How have your parents reacted to your being at university?
- Can you discuss what you do at university with your siblings/friends/parents?
- Is there a social difference between your friends at university and your friends at home?
- Do your friends from university spend time with you at your home?
- Do you spend time with your university friends at their homes?
- How much time do you spend at home in a year?

14. Why do you think I have had difficulties in recruiting academically successful white working class males for my research?

15. Do you mind telling me if your parents own their home? Were you on FSM?

16. What factor/s do you think contributed to your academic success?

- Did you have a mentor?
- How have you managed this year?
- Do you have a mentor at university?
- Was there someone who inspired you to make you want to do well at school/university?
- Did your Mother have any influence on the academic decisions you made?
- Was there a teacher who motivated you to consider higher education?
- Was your success driven by fear of any kind – of failure, poverty?

- **How did you learn to value education?**
- **Do you think your siblings value education? Why?**
- New questions

17.To what do you contribute white working class boys academic under achievement?

- Why do you think this is?
- What would need to change for them to be encouraged to achieve academically?

18.What do you understand by success?

- Are you successful?
- Who do you perceive as being successful?

19. Individual Questions (██████: modern university: sports science)

- Do you recall how your brother did in his GCSEs?
- Did he go to college?
- Why do you think your brother did not go on to university?
- What is he doing now?
- When was your dyslexia diagnosed? Did you get any help at school? Uni?
- What was the name of your last primary school? Do you recall how long you were there?

20.Is there anything that we have not covered in the interview that you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and help. If you think of anything else please feel free to email me. I look forward to meeting you for the third interview next year.

Appendix F: Interview Schedule 3

■■■■ University (I have modified the questionnaire to be specific to each participant)

Academically Successful Males of a Working Class Background

Interview Three

Aide Memoire for interviews with students

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for a third time. As you know I am currently undertaking a study that explores the factors that contribute towards the academic success of white males from a working class background. Everything that is said in the interview will be confidential and as I write up my research I will ensure all responses will remain anonymous. It would be very helpful if I can tape record the interview, unless there are any objections. If at any point you would like to terminate the interview please let me know. Thank you.

Objective:

To establish:

1. From the viewpoint of the white males from a working class background who partook in the study, what motivators and factors led to their academic success?
2. From what they say, what experiences, if any, do these academically successful white males from a working class background have in common? What, if anything, is distinctive?
3. What are the occupational outcomes of studying different degrees at different types of higher education providers?
4. What is success? How does the sample construct success?

Questions:

21. Remind me what mark you received in second year? 2:2

22. Can you tell me a bit about how your family and friends are feeling about your next move/career?

- How have your siblings reacted?

- How has your Mother reacted?
- Is there a social difference between your friends at university and your friends at home?
- Do your university friends visit you at home? Do you visit them?
- How much time do you spend at home in a year?
- When you start working where do you envisage living?
- Do you think you have changed over the last three years? How you think? The activities you partake in?
- What about your social class? You responded to the email as a white working class male. How do you feel now? Why?

23. Do you mind telling me if your Mother owns the home? What is the postcode?

- Were you on FSM? **Yes**
- EMA? **Yes**
- Maintenance grants? **Yes**
- How long do you envisage it will take you to pay back your student loan? Do you know how much it is? Do you know when you will begin paying it back? Do you know the interest rate you will be charged?

24. Are you currently in a relationship?

- What does your partner do?
- Does having a partner limit you in any way?
- Is having a partner stabilising/helpful?
- What are her plans for next year?

25. What work you did over the summer?

- I think you were coaching weren't you?
- Did the work contribute towards building your CV?
- Did you do any reading/plan dissertation or the like?
- Did you go on holiday?
- Did you spend much time at home?
- You spent most of the holidays in Halls?
- Are you a senior resident again this year? How are you getting on?

26. Can you tell me about your academic experience this year at university?

- Has it been a positive experience?
- How have you coped with the workload?
- Have you had any feedback for work submitted?
- Have you had any problems academically?
- If so did you seek out or receive any help from tutors?
- Have you enjoyed your subject?
- How many hours of lectures do you have?
- Where do you think [REDACTED] rates as a university?
- You said that you were going to really knuckle down in third year and try and get a 2:1 do you think you have done that?
- Do you have any exams?
- What about your plans immediately after you hand in your last assignment/s?

27. Can you tell me a bit about your social experiences this year at university?

- How have you found the social aspect of university life this year?
- Have you faced any particular issues? Any social class issues?
- How much time are you spending doing rugby club things?
- Are you vice-president/secretary this year?
- How do you feel you are coping with university life generally?
- Did you find that the language used by lecturers was unfamiliar to you?
- Do the university have any big social events – Balls? What about an end of university Ball/party?

28. How would you describe your third year at university?

- Has being at university changed you? Broadened your horizons?
- If so in what ways?
- Have you built up your CV?
- Would you recommend university to other 'bright' working class males? Which university?
- Are there any costs – social, emotional, breaking ties with family and friends?

29. Can you tell me a bit about your work plans

- I think you said that you wanted to go into teaching and train on the job?
- Have you applied for any jobs?
- If not when do you plan to?
- How helpful has the university been in helping you to apply?
- If you do not find a job before you complete university what do you plan to do?
- Any thoughts of doing a PGCE?
- Have you given any thought to what your income might be in your first job?

- If you do not manage to find employment would you go home?
- Have your university friends got future plans?

30. Why do you think I have had difficulties in recruiting academically successful white working class males for my research?

31. To what do you contribute white working class boys academic under achievement?

- Why do you think this is?
- What would need to change for them to be encouraged to achieve academically?

32. If you had to make policy suggestions to support more working class males to become academically successful what would you suggest?

33. What factor/s do you think contributed to your academic success?

- Did you have a mentor/sponsor/tutor who helped you adjust to life at university?
- How have you managed this year?
- At school how did you see yourself academically?
- At school, on a scale where would you place yourself between 'one of the lads' to 'geek'?
- Why did you choose to read physical education and sport at Uni?
- Where do you see yourself in 5...10 years' time?
- What are your long term aspirations?
- Do you think there is anything the university could do when you first arrive to make the transition to university life any easier? Explain the teaching process, what standard of work is expected? Check that socially people are getting on??

34. What do you understand by success?

- Are you successful?
- Who do you perceive as being successful?
- Do you think you have been/are lucky?

35. Is there anything that we have not covered in the interview that you would like to add?

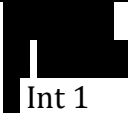
Thank you for your time and help. If you think of anything else please feel free to email me. I wish you well for the future.

Appendix G: Biographical Details of a Participant Completed After Initial Interview

Family	School	University	Success	Reasons for WWCM poor academic record	Other
Mother encourages academics/ homework	Both schools chosen because they were close to home. Sixth form college chosen because it was sport orientated	Reading Sports Science at a modern university	Academic success down to Mother.	Parents	At the start of the interview was slightly reticent.
Parents both left school at 15/16. Mother later trained as a nurse. Father is a builder	Football was extracurricular activity throughout schooling	Career – PE teacher or football coach	Yr 5 teacher and maths teacher in primary school also influential	Lack of motivation	Answers became more comprehensive as the interview continued
Parents are together	Enjoyed primary school mainly because of the sport	May do PGCE	Friends are doing 'nothing'	Teachers should expect more from WWCM's	Casually dressed
Lives at home – working class attachment to the familiar	Always good at maths. In the gifted and talented programme for maths which involved an after school club	Works in holidays, coaching sport.	Definition of success: passing uni, getting a job and building on that	Quote....my Mum who has been there. I think if someone has that support that relationship and person that they can look up to that will help.	Not very tall

Family	School	University	Success	Reasons for WWCM poor academic record	Other
No books or computer at home	Two teachers influential and encouraging of academics – the maths teacher and Yr 5 teacher	Academic work a bit of a shock. Was not what he was expecting. Failed first semester and had to retake in summer.			
Mother did the research and helped choose subjects for 6 th form	Felt he did well at primary school	Never failed anything until the first semester of Uni – found that shocking			
Friends not academic – football people	Some disruption from rowdy chn.	Once he understood what was expected he found it easier and got a 2:2 in second semester.			
Mother always encourages school work	High school also a positive experience	Now enjoying Uni – ‘making me a more independent person’			
Mother suggested University/ did the research on courses and insisted they visit uni’s	Always struggled with English	Aiming for a 2:1 as he understands that this is what you need to get ahead.			

Family	School	University	Success	Reasons for WWCM Poor Academic Record	Other
	GCSE results: B for Maths and Geography; c for French; E for English; Others ?	Sport is what he likes doing.			
	At High School thought that he would like a career in sport				
	Went to a 6 th Form College that was sport orientated. This involved a bus ride. The College paid expenses.				
	Chose to do A level Maths and Geography and a B Tec in Sport				
	Results: Merit, merit, merit in B Tech. Not sure of A level results – thinks two C's				
	Enjoyed 6 th Form College				

Family	School	University	Success	Reasons for WWCM poor academic record	Other
	Did not do much work in lower 6 th so had to 'buck up' after deciding to go to University.				
	College provided UCAS tutorials				 Int 1

Appendix H: Ethical Approval Email

25th October 2012

Mary-Claire Travers
Department of Education & Professional Studies



Dear Mary-Claire,

REP(EM)/12/13-2 'A Study of Academically Successful White Working Class Males in England.'

I am pleased to inform you that the above application has been reviewed by the E&M Research Ethics Panel that FULL APPROVAL is now granted.

Please ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in the King's College London Guidelines on Good Practice in Academic Research (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/college/policyzone/index.php?id=247>).

For your information ethical approval is granted until 24/10/15. If you need approval beyond this point you will need to apply for an extension to approval at least two weeks prior to this explaining why the extension is needed, (please note however that a full re-application will not be necessary unless the protocol has changed). You should also note that if your approval is for one year, you will not be sent a reminder when it is due to lapse.

Ethical approval is required to cover the duration of the research study, up to the conclusion of the research. The conclusion of the research is defined as the final date or event detailed in the study description section of your approved application form (usually the end of data collection when all work with human participants will have been completed), not the completion of data analysis or publication of the results. For projects that only involve the further analysis of pre-existing data, approval must cover any period during which the researcher will be accessing or evaluating individual sensitive and/or un-anonymised records. Note that after the point at which ethical approval for your study is no longer required due to the study being complete (as per the above definitions), you will still need to ensure all research data/records management and storage procedures agreed to as part of your application are adhered to and carried out accordingly.

If you do not start the project within three months of this letter please contact the Research Ethics Office.

Should you wish to make a modification to the project or request an extension to approval you will need approval for this and should follow the guidance relating to modifying approved applications:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/applications/modifications.aspx>

The circumstances where modification requests are required include the addition/removal of participant groups, additions/removal/changes to research methods, asking for additional data from participants, extensions to the ethical approval period. Any proposed modifications should only be carried out once full approval for the modification request has been granted.

Any unforeseen ethical problems arising during the course of the project should be reported to the approving committee/panel. In the event of an untoward event or an adverse reaction a full report must be made to the Chair of the approving committee/review panel within one week of the incident.

Please would you also note that we may, for the purposes of audit, contact you from time to time to ascertain the status of your research.

If you have any query about any aspect of this ethical approval, please contact your panel/committee administrator in the first instance (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/contact.aspx>). We wish you every success with this work.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Butcher
Research Ethics Officer

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

REP(EM)/12/13-2

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Academically Successful White Working Class Boys

We would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

- The aim of the study is to contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of the factors that contribute to the academic success of white working class boys. I hope to produce detailed, critical and contextualised accounts of the life experiences of academically successful working class males and establish which common factors, if any, have contributed to their success.
 - I am recruiting white males of a working class background who are beginning their second year of undergraduate study.
 - The participants will be interviewed three times over an 18-24 month period. Each interview will be approximately one hour long. The first interview will be in the first term of the participants 2nd year of university, the second interview will take place in the third term of their 2nd year and the final interview will take place at the end of their third year. The interviews will take place at the participants' university or at a public place of convenience
 - It is anticipated that as the questions are exploring positive aspects of the participant's education the interview will not precipitate any distress.
 - Participants have the right not have to answer any questions that they do not wish to.
-
- Participants will be potentially contributing to knowledge which could dispel easy stereotypes and encourage educators and others to enhance academic success in young males. A copy of the final study will be offered to the participants should they wish to read it.

- Interviews will be audio recorded, subject to receiving the participant's permission. These recordings will be securely stored according to Kings College London and DPS 1998 guidelines for the length of the project and will then be erased. All responses will be anonymised and will be untraceable.
- This information sheet will be given to you, the participant, to keep and you will be asked to sign the consent form.
- A decision to withdraw up to July 2013, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of education you receive.
- In addition to withdrawing yourself from the study, you may also withdraw any data/information you have provided up until 1st September 2014.
- Mary-Claire Travers. Email: mary-claire.travers@kcl.ac.uk

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw up to July 2013 and without giving a reason.

If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information:

Supervisor: Professor Meg Maguire. Email: meg.maguire@kcl.ac.uk

Appendix J: Consent Form For Participants

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.



Title of Study: Academically Successful White Working Class Boys

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref REP(EM)/12/13-2

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to 1st September 2014.

☐

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

☐

I consent to my interview being recorded.

Yes/No

The information you have submitted will be published as a report and you will be sent a copy. Please note that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify you from any publications.

☐

Participant's Statement:

I _____

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed

Date

Investigator's Statement:

I _____

Confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the participant.

Signed

Date

Appendix K: Coding

Appendix K

Coding

Lucky?

~~Myan~~: I can always remember being, just getting along just fine. If that makes sense. I don't, my teachers never pulled me aside and I never had extra help, I was never in a special class because I wasn't particularly good at maths or English. I can just remember at that stage of my life just getting on just fine and I was just happy with that, you know. I was looking back at my work and I was getting quite luckily, I look back at my primary school work and I was getting, and they would kind of mark it and say what you could improve on and I was never, you know it was never the case of ~~me~~ doesn't need to improve on anything, or Dan is getting by or excelling, it was ~~me~~ always tries his best and that is all we could ask for and that was always the case at that stage.

MT: And what about, was it a positive experience, when you think back on it or how do you feel about your primary school?

~~Myan~~: I loved it, absolutely love it. I think of it very fondly and used to go back there all the time and say hello to the teachers. I can remember absolutely loving school, absolutely adore it. That is all I wanted to do.

MT: And were there any particular teachers that stood out or was there anyone particular who encouraged you or ...?

~~Myan~~: I don't ever remember being particularly encouraged at that time, at other times yes, but not at that time. Maybe because I just don't remember it but what I do remember is, it is funny because I was always helping out in library club but I never used to read myself, which is bizarre. I still don't read that is why all the books on my shelf are history books, I don't read for pleasure I read, I wouldn't say I particularly enjoyed reading. It is strange, it is a bizarre concept. But I can remember being very close to my teachers and probably was a bit of a teacher's pet and so they probably did encourage me and I would have done extra work would they have set it for me, but nothing particularly sticks out.

teacher's pet

MT: And so you attended primary school in Portsmouth.

~~Myan~~: Yes, Portsmouth.

MT: And what was it called?

~~Myan~~: It was called Northern Parade Infant School and then I moved up to the junior school as well.

Life changing experience?

MT: OK and then when you moved on to senior school, how did you make that decision or you know?

~~Myan~~: Sorry, I have just thought, can I just go back to the previous question. So I was kind of working on primary school being slightly different, it changed slightly on moving up to years 3, 4, 5 and 6. The one thing that sticks out particularly in my head is my year 6 SATS results, when my teacher read out to the class and I got 5 B's in all my subjects. And for English she said 'oh ~~me~~, you got top of the class, we didn't expect that' and that stuck in my head, I don't know why but I can always remember 'we didn't expect you' and of course she didn't mean it in any derogatory way, she was like 'well done' you know. But at that point I was just getting along just fine. I can remember doing a rainforest presentation in year 5 and I had to do it to the year 6's because it was so good. So there were

Good SATS results

Rainforest project Yr 5

3

indications that I was ^{beginning} being to find my way a bit and enjoy what I do now, which is speaking and presenting and sharing my knowledge.

MT: So there were some...

Indications, yes. Those are some things that stick out but not necessarily because of the teachers because I went to not particularly good schools. I never felt particularly pushed. If that makes sense because they were always dealing with other children who were being very naughty for whatever reasons. So I very much, that rainforest project was my own initiative, I took it home because I was really enjoying it and did it myself. In the same way, I always struggled with maths and I would never put my hand up in maths class and I always thought that I was rubbish but then I worked hard and made sure I got some revision books and asked my Mum for some revision books so she was always very, very supportive you know. My Mum is the reason I am at university because she was always incredibly supportive and brought me up singlehandedly in the best way she possibly could. I can remember just working away and I would do it just completely off myself and not because the teacher wanted me to. Then as you say, going back to the question you asked about transferring to secondary school, I went where everyone else went, which was Mayfield School in Portsmouth. A comprehensive school that was in special measures when I went there. It was lifted out of special measures while I was there, so again, not a very good school. You know regularly under 20% of people passing their GCSEs. I can remember being in lessons where we had, he always described himself as being from Yugoslavia observing that Yugoslavia doesn't exist anymore but I can remember being in a maths lesson with him and the class being completely polarised, split down two sides and things being thrown over, chairs would be going, you know I had been caught up in the middle of a fight, not with me, but I have been punched because two, because the fight had broken out beside me and I would describe my early years of education when it had just come out of special measures as quite often, you know, terrible. Again, I was very quiet, now I was particularly ginger, I was becoming more clever and you know, visible clever, now I was getting my teachers congratulate me 'you got the best mark in class' and consistently getting the best mark in class now and I was also had really bad goofy teeth because I have a bad problem where I have too many teeth in my mouth. I have got three sets of teeth and they would all start coming down and it would mean my mouth was a load of teeth so I didn't, I was always picked on for being goofy, for being ginger haired and clever. So you know, I just kept myself to myself and you know I always said that I would just do what I did best, I would just get on, I wasn't in the cool group at school, I can remember hanging around with the people, who now I would describe as the geeky people, you know the people that were clearly on the outside the social fringes. I would just get on and just do it. I still love school and I loved doing all these subjects and I loved going into the library again and I still would go into the library, I wouldn't read, I just liked going into the library, I don't know, maybe it was just being surrounded by them, I just kind of enjoyed it. So the transition, it wasn't a hard transition and I can remember being picked to do the book quiz and things like that and getting certificates in assemblies and things like that, again this was me being to really, really shine by the end of secondary school I had become Head Boy...

MT: Did this school just go to GCSE?

Yes, just GCSE. So I was Head Boy, I headed up a team of 40 Prefects, I was suddenly very much in the centre, I was performing on stage, I was speaking in front of parents and people and I

Mother!

Chaos in Classroom

became aware of academic ability & high sch

Issues with appearance

HEAD BOY

would describe the secondary school as the school that made me because it turned me from a very timid person who was just clever, get on with it, not particularly bothered about friends, I would happily go home and watch television because I had my brother, and I loved my brother dearly. So then I became, you know it actually as bigheaded as it sounds, I became popular and it was a wonderful, wonderful experience because I was appreciated for being clever and yes, there would be a little jibe once every now and then but I was the top of my school, I was in terms of grades and being Head Boy and I had made this kind of absolute curve where I was confident, I had had my teeth sorted out because I had braces and this is when I thought, you know what I am going to try and go to university.

Success

MT: Interesting.

■: So going to university was as much as confidence, was more a confidence thing that it was an academic thing, if that makes sense. Because you come from a school that doesn't do particularly well, you think oh well, I can get so many A* but I didn't necessarily equate that to going to university. What I equated to university was myself, with being confident with who I was and being able to demonstrate that knowledge and being accepted for that. I felt that often, that previously held me back. So I finished school with 9 A*'s and 7A's. The closest to me was 1 A* and I also had some AS levels as well because the school ran what was called an accelerated learning programme whereby if you were in the accelerated programme, you were supposed to take your GCSEs in year 10, so you can take your AS levels in year 11. I was the only person who got my GCSEs in year 10. So I did A levels whilst everyone else took their GCSEs. So I came out with 3 AS levels.

MT: Leaving at GCSE level.

■: At GCSE. So that English one I did by myself because no-one else got their GCSE English. The history one I did with two other people because they passed and got above a C but I got A*. Then I did a drama AS level as well because again, A* and other people had just passed. So by that time I knew I was clever and I knew that I could do well.

AS Self taught English

Aged 16

MT: Now were there any teachers that stand out as encouraging you or do you think it really ...?

■: By this time yes, if in primary and junior school I wasn't particularly encouraged, because I was more confident myself at secondary school, I was more able to ask for help. I was more able and more willing to contribute in class and to demonstrate my intelligence because I thought well I know the answer and I am not worried about people think about that. I am going to do it and I am going to express my interest, so I would go into school on Saturday's with the teachers, as the teachers would be in on Saturday's and we would have little one-to-one sessions where they would help me because they couldn't help me in class necessarily.

Teachers came in on Sat to teach him

MT: So who was the instigated by?

■: So the school ran what was called Saturday School which was primarily for ICT coursework because they said not everyone has computer programmes and computers at home, so you can come in and finished your coursework at the weekend. But then my French teacher started coming in and it would often me just be and a few other people but the other people would usually leave because they got bored and we would just do French speaking practice. She was called Mde. Slaplinski and again she was fundamental in allowing me to realise that I could go far and we would

Appendix L: An Example of a Transcription

■: Well the year before us they got one person into Oxford, I don't know about before that. I think it is a very infrequent thing but they have got people dedicated to try and get people into Oxbridge.

MT: Yes, interesting. So you went to sixth form college, on what basis did you go to that particular college?

■: Again, it was the nearest one and that was the one most people were going to and also it was the one that my brother had gone to.

MT: OK so yes. And what did your parents think about you both going on to the sixth form, was that something that was encouraged at home or was it...?

■: I think it was expected.

MT: Right.

■: They knew me and my brother were both very, quite bright and so they just expected that we would both go on because they knew stopping at GCSEs isn't really the accepting thing now, you have to go and do A levels as well.

MT: And do you think they expect that of your sister?

■: They know my sister is different to us, she is less academic, she is more active and sporty and kind of stuff like that. So I am not sure what they expect of her. But I will probably see that in a couple of years what they do.

MT: Yes. And then you chose what 5 subjects to do for AS level?

■: Just 4.

MT: And... which were?

■: Maths, Further Maths, Physics and Economics.

MT: And why those?

■: OK maths and further maths were just because I loved maths at GCSE and from that I thought if I'm going to be going to uni I am going to do a maths degree, I would have liked to have done computing but my college didn't offer that. So I didn't do it. I wasn't going to do IT because that was very, very different to computing. It is more using the software and making documents and stuff whereas computing is programming and making things really.

MT: Yes. The IT course is just working with computers. That is what I need!

■: So I kind of realised that I was going to do a maths course, physics goes in with that at A level a lot and after that I again wanted something that was maths and I kind of looked through the courses and I kind of knew which ones

were widely recognised as a good subject and economics is quite a classic subject and so I went with that one.

MT: OK, so you are in the lower sixth form and you have decided that you want to go to Oxford or Cambridge and you do the couple of days. Then you have got to get your UCAS form in, did you get any help there with your personal statement?

■: I wrote up my whole personal statement and had to cut out about half of it to get under the word limit.

MT: No it isn't very many words is it?

■: No you don't get much at all. Then I asked one of the tutors to look over it, are you allowed to do that?

MT: I was going to say, I think quite a few people don't write their own personal statements but that is also another issue!

■: Yes, it is. I did write my own, thankfully then I asked one of the there were two Oxbridge advisors, who took us to the open day, they helped us out with everything they could and one of them was a languages teacher, so I let her look over it, she fixed all my....

MT: Grammar...

■: Yes, so she sorted that out and then I just sent it off.

MT: And then what about interview practice?

■: Interview practice, my head of maths in the college, who we had as a further maths teacher, he gave the four of us who were doing, no, the three of us, who were applying for maths subjects. There was me for maths and comps science, there was another guy for Oxford, maths and a guy for Cambridge, maths. So he gave us a practice interview, he gave them two reasonable questions that they could work out, then asked me if maths was an art or a science. So I just had to debate a philosophical thing!

MT: And was that anything like the interviews you had when you came here do you think?

■: No, not my question definitely not! Their questions were sort of more similar in that it was working out the way you think and how it works but none of it felt like proper real practice.

MT: Let's talk about how you chose your college because you do actually apply to a particular college as opposed to Oxford itself.

■: Yes but I applied to Worcester. I interviewed there and I applied to Bailey Hall and then I just got an offer from here. Which was an odd one.

MT: Interesting, yes. So obviously at those two places they have decided that they haven't got room for you but you are good enough to come...

■: Yes, I was in one of my computing labs and one of the helpers just came and said 'oh you're from univ aren't you? Yes, I was one of the helpers who interviewed you at Worcester. Sorry you didn't get in to any of the colleges you applied to but you were good enough to get in but you weren't right for those colleges. So we just had to make sure you got into somewhere.'

MT: Interesting, so they look after you in a strange way. So did you visit other universities than Oxford and Cambridge?

■: I basically applied to them and went to them on their open days. I visited Southampton and Bristol.

MT: OK.

■: And Southampton seemed OK. Bristol seemed really good, I really liked Bristol but the offer for Bristol was the exact same offer for Oxford, so I knew which one I was going to choose out of them. But other than that, I had seen Sheffield University just from a friend, but nothing.

MT: And you weren't tempted to go to the same university as your brother?

■: No I kind of, through the sixth form time, I had wanted my independence from him, from being in his shadow which I'd been a lot. Mostly through high school because he was as good as me throughout high school and in sixth form he started dropping, whereas I carried on. So I kind of got a bit better from that but I kind of wanted to do my own thing and go my own way.

MT: So I forgot to ask you what marks did you get for your A levels?

■: My A levels I got A* for maths and further maths and an A in physics. I dropped economics between lower and upper sixth, in that I got a B at AS.

MT: In economics?

■: Yes. That was mainly from me not enjoying it rather than any lack of ability I suppose.

MT: Did you say your brother was reading maths too?

■: He reads computer science.

MT: That is right, you said. So I could ask you why you chose the course you chose?

■: It was because I loved the maths and I was pretty sure I was going to love computer science and I knew they did a joint degree and it seemed quite interesting. I had looked at course outlines and nothing else seemed really...

MT: And how have you found it?

■: I found it great. I think the mix is a really good pick for me. There are about 3 people in maths and comp sci at this college in my year and one of them loves the maths but doesn't like the comp sci very much, the other one loves the comp

sci and doesn't like the maths very much, whereas I am really in the middle of it. I think it worked out quite well.

MT: Fantastic. And did you get any advice from any of your teachers about what course to do?

■: I don't think so really, I think I mostly decided it on my own. One of my teachers in sixth form kind of said 'you shouldn't drop the fourth A level because they won't accept you if you don't have four A levels', I basically did my own research and said 'you are wrong' – well actually I didn't tell him...

Appendix M: Open coding of three different transcripts showing influence of "Mother"

MT: It will be interesting to see. And so what do you contribute your academic success to then? ✓

My Mum for being Mum, for being there, for supporting me in no particular way, you know she never forced me until later on but in just being a solid rock through everything because the divorce hit me hard, really hard and that pushed me into my shell a bit. It hit me hard, I had real troubles with my Dad as well, arguments, tears, not seeing each other and that, if Mum hadn't been there, no way would I have been able to have that solid base of education. Lay on top of that Mum who provided the financial means and the 'you can' to academia and the ability for me to go home and to be questioned and to be pushed and even just at the dinner table he would push for me to formulate answers to things, to make connections, to the teachers at school for taking the time aside to help me and of course, for providing the endless opportunities and their final ticks in the boxes and the bit of patronage that is needed to get into places like Cambridge. That is how... I say as a historian that I want something more satisfactory, more of a conclusion, I want an analysis of, but I think if I was writing an essay those would be my paragraphs.

patronage

MT: Do you think success at any stage was motivated by fear of failure or?

I have always been scared of letting my parents down, when I say my parents, I mean my Mum and my step-dad because they have invested so much time, so much effort and so much money in making me the best that I can possibly be. They have given me including my grandparents actually, everything they never had because they came from very underprivileged families, very, very, not poverty, but not well off at all.

pressure

MT: OK. And did anyone encourage you to work hard at school?

My Mum always takes her time for me, encouraged me in school work and still does today when I need a bit of encouragement or get stressed with something.

MT: OK and in your school, your primary school this is, was there much disruption from some people or...

No they were... it was quite a small school, so there wasn't a lot of people in there that we had trouble with.

Mum encouraging

MT: Alright. OK and when it came to choosing secondary schools, how did you come to choose?

Well there was one outside my catchment area which is my school which was always known to be the best state school around my area but I went to because I wasn't in the catchment area, I think if I remember my Mum actually put our house up for sale because she wanted us to live in that catchment area. And I always remember, I think I was in year 6 and we were supposed to choose and we were having these mentor lessons to choose, the way to choose your school and all my friends were in this one group and I was currently in the group and I always remember feeling left out and I said to my Mum one day, I don't want to go to school, I want to go to school which is the school I attended, I remember my Dad saying, well if he doesn't want to go then he can go to this one. I think, I don't remember how it happened but I think I started crying one night because I didn't want to go to the one without my friends so I ended up going with my friends.

Mother wanted better secondary school

MT: Yes and so you got the A's and B's, was that thanks to you or thanks to the teaching?

[redacted]: My Mum.

MT: Oh right, why?

[redacted]: My Mum making me do all the work, 'you are not leaving, you are doing the revision'.

MT: Oh right.

[redacted]: You have got to work for this, so she, her and I essentially taught myself the maths syllabus to be honest and just literally repetition and revision sort of thing. I would put my science results down to [redacted] and certainly not and yes.

MT: So your mother understood the importance of learning. So when did you decide you were going to go on, did the school have a sixth form or did you have to go to a college?

[redacted]: They have [redacted] college is like they are linked to so I went to [redacted] college. That was a no brainer for me because I didn't want to work, I was like I don't really want to have a job at the moment, so I will go to college and then stay in education for as long as possible.

MT: So do you think you were encouraged at home to stay on to college?

[redacted]: Yes and basically Mum was like your strength is your brain not with your hands don't let your hands, so I was like fair enough.

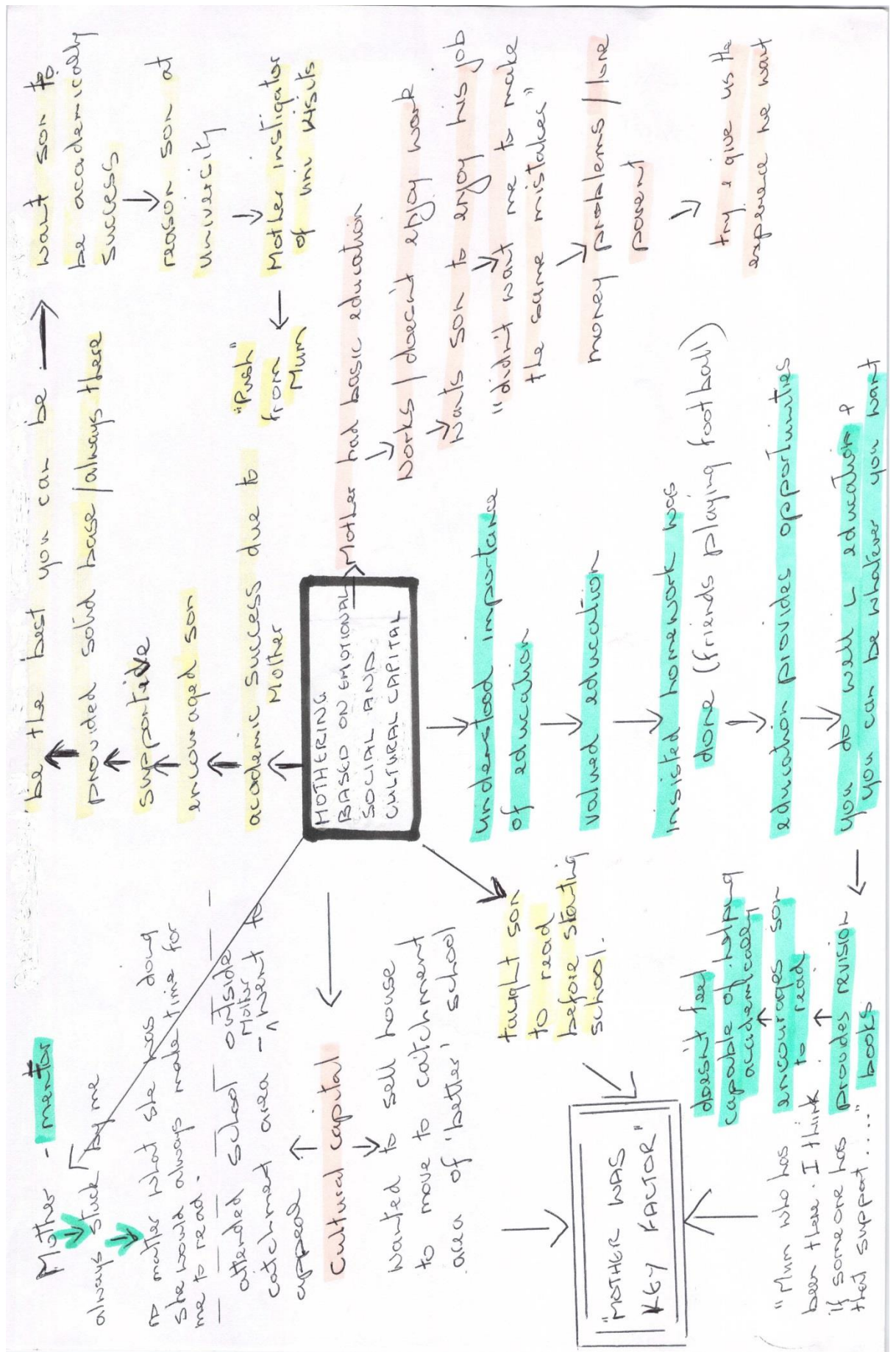
MT: So your mother had quite a big influence on your academic career do you think?

[redacted]: I would say she pushed me in the right direction, it would be the way, if I hadn't of gone that way I think I would have regretted it but yes certainly like I would probably have gone to college anyway.

for reason
Success
Moller

Got best to
for
college
because he
did not
want to

Appendix N: An example of clustering codes moving into axial coding



Appendix P: Coding map "Mother" as key

